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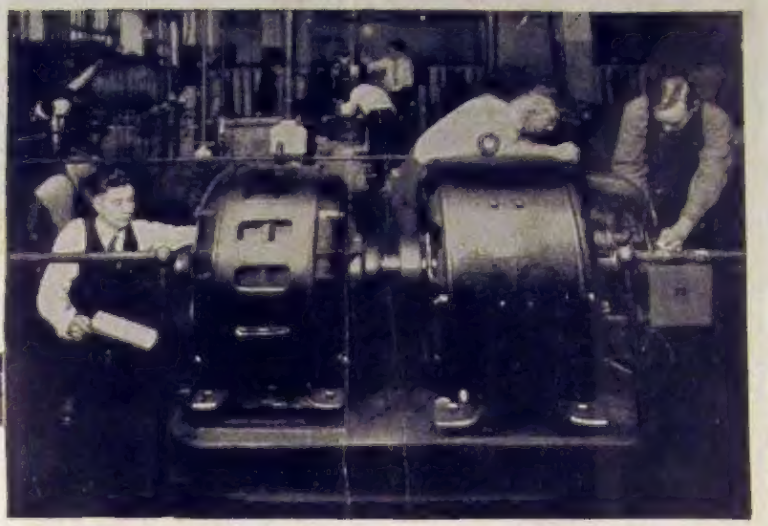

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Vol. 6, No. 2 May, 1927

Frontier Stories

HARRY E. MAULE
Editor

A. H. BITTNER
Associate Editor

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN - H. C. MURPHY

BARBARY BLOOD—Complete Novel - - - - - - - - George E. Holt 3
Blank and innocent appeared the city walls of Arzila, yet within their winding passages and hidden grottos Brandon Grey, of the Moroccan Secret Service, faced a terrible fate.

WANTED——? - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Eugene Cunningham 46
A tough enough job it was to round up the supposed killer of Eph Carson, but then young Ware, Texas Ranger, found his task had only begun.

THE SON OF A SEA COOK - - - - - - - - - - - - S. B. H. Hurst 60
Yes, Epictetus Jones was even willing to be a son of a sea cook for a bottle of hootch—and after that he was willing to be the son of anything.

NO QUARTER - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - William Crump Rush 69
Not so different from the knights of old were the cowpunchers—except that it's a lot more comfortable to avoid spear-thrusts in an iron suit than to face flying lead behind a scrub of cactus.

THREE WISE MEN OF THE NORTH - - - - - - August Eberhardt 76
Slippery Wilson discovers that all chechahkoes aren't as green as they look, and that dreams sometimes come true.

KING OF THE THUNDERING BAR—Novelette - - - Robert V. Carr 88
Claim-jumpers usually got either gold or lead for their trouble, but Jake Ender had a novelty in store for them.

THE DESERT—Poem - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Ben A. Miller 108
That's the desert, pard, "jest hell an' beauty"—the land of silent death and golden promise.

DAYONG GETS MISLAID - - - - - - - - - - Warren Hastings Miller 109
Confidently Dayong wagered his life on the dependability of Bruce Romney, his Secret Service chief—and for a time Romney seemed to fail.

LONG-LEAF LANDS—Novelette - - - - - - - - - - J. E. Grinstead 119
A fortune in East Texas timber Sam Smedley was out to grab—if not by trickery and gold, then by fire and lead.

A CUPID IN SEA BOOTS - - - - - - - - - - - James K. Waterman 135
A monumental battle it was when Cap'n Bob Heldare tackled the Unknown, a battle that was to have results neither foresaw—and a sequel on the far-distant whaling grounds.

RANDOM SHADOWS OF THE OLD FRONTIER - Robert V. Carr 145
The old frontier lives again in these vivid reminiscences of an old-timer clinging to the memories of his glorious youth as his feet follow the sunset trail.

THE CROSS AND DOUBLE CROSS—Novelette - - - Martin Stevers 152
Captain Andy Corbin knew he was in for trouble on that trip up the Missouri—but once the "Eagle's" paddle wheels started churning he found that trouble truly comes in bunches.

THE TRADING POST - 174
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BARBARY BLOOD

By GEORGE E. HOLT

From a dinner table Fate pitched Brandon Grey, chief of the Sultan's Secret Service, into an adventure on which hung the throne of Morocco—and in which cold steel or a swift bullet was the penalty for failure.

Chapter I

I PROVE GAME

THE key of chance unlocks the door of adventure. I had left New York City for a conference in Singapore with Benjamin Lowndes, of the Lowndes Concessions, Ltd. At Gibraltar I learned that as the result of blood poisoning induced by the bite of a tiny red spider, the plans which had been formulating between the Englishman and me would never come to a head; Benjamin Lowndes was dead.

Upon the heels of this news a cablegram flashed across the Straits from Morocco, a message from my old friend and sometime fellow-adventurer, Brandon Grey, suggesting I come over.

"You might find it interesting," the wire ended.

Interesting!

Wherefore, on a certain June evening, instead of being on shipboard bound for Singapore, I was plunged abruptly into the whirlpool of violence and intrigue which swirled beneath the lazy Oriental life of the land of the Moors.

"Are you game?" Brandon Grey had asked. And to that challenge there was, of course, but one answer.

I had been no more than six hours in Tangier before I had begun to feel a certain tension from the atmosphere which hung about Brandon Grey. It had begun when we had clasped hands on the wooden pier and had looked into each other's eyes. I realized at that moment that Grey was no longer the careless adventurer I had known in years gone by, who had faced with me the assegais of Menelik's war-

riors in Abyssinia and the multiple dangers of India and Thibet. I suspected that he had become a man with a purpose. There was beneath the gay smile and bantering tone of the pal of former days a solidity of which words and smile and laughter were only garments of concealment.

More and more I felt this as the hours passed, during which we sat at ease in the patio of his house and chatted about past adventures. But what his new purpose in life might be he did not then divulge, and I did not press for information. He was one in whom I had entire confidence—through strenuous experience.

But when in the evening I sat down at his dining table as one of four guests, I was convinced that his mission was deeply concerned with Moroccan affairs, which are always dangerous.

Morocco offered adventures, offered danger, offered high achievement, even to a foreigner, an American. I knew the country somewhat, having lived there once for a year or more; but Grey knew it intimately, so intimately that he spoke casually of matters strange to me.

The other three guests at his dining table were native gentlemen arrayed in the white swathing robes of formality; dark eyed, dark bearded, and, except for one, fair skinned. This one was brown skinned and yet with no trace in his features of the negroid mixture. Of the two white Moors I need say nothing further; they were high officials from the office of the Sultan's representative in Tangier, friends, it seemed, of Brandon Grey. They talked of everything except politics. But the third man, Sidi Achmed Lahya, spoke little; and when he did speak referred almost invariably to the disturbed condition of the country, to the efforts being made by France and Germany to seize control and to oust the reigning Sultan, or to the attempts of unpatriotic Moors to create rebellion and to place another Sultan upon the throne.

We had gotten, I judged, almost through the somewhat elaborate meal, when a servant entered and whispered something to Brandon Grey. Excusing himself, our host rose and left the room. In a moment he returned to the doorway and beckoned me to him.

"Are you," he asked, when I reached him, "game for a night ride—and probably a fight?"

I told him that I was if it was not too long a ride nor too big a fight. I was rather soft. For the last few years my exercise and my adventures had been few and far between.

He nodded and smiled, left me standing there while he spoke to his guests; explaining, as I understood, that he had been urgently summoned to the house of a friend who had been stricken ill. He begged them to make themselves comfortable and command the servants as though they were in their own homes.

CLOSING the door upon them, Brandon Grey hurried me to his sleeping quarters. From a bureau drawer he took heavy automatic pistols with holsters and belts. He handed one to me and strapped the other around his waist; handed me clips of cartridges.

"But look here, Brandon," I said. "Aren't we going to change clothes? These things—" The idea of going into a fight in evening dress struck me as grotesque.

"Not a moment to change, old man," he flashed back at me. "Let's go."

"Where?" I managed to ask as I followed him.

"Tell you on the way," he said. "Let's get going."

We reached the cobbled patio into which, at that moment, a native groom led two saddled horses. I was relieved to note that they bore Texas saddles; were powerful beasts. Brandon Grey beat me to saddle, but not much. He swung his horse toward the gate, and I followed.

In the open road which ran past the house, and from which the courtyard opened, a lantern gleamed in the hands of another groom, and by its feeble lights I perceived brown robed, bare legged native horsemen. And although I could not see their faces because the hoods of their *djellabas* were dropped, I could see those points on the left shoulders which tell clearly as words that rifles are slung across the backs of the riders under their garments.

"Ride," commanded Grey, and galloped off.

As I followed I could not help smiling at the picture, or rather, at the two pictures, of Brandon Grey and myself, for I knew that my own aspect resembled that of the figure ahead of me—a man in evening clothes, the trousers already crawling up the legs and revealing the white of an undergarment, the feet in patent leather

pumps thrust into wooden stirrups, the silk short dinner jacket blowing back, the glazed white shirt bosom and high collar gleaming phosphorescently in the starlight, and panama hat topping it all; followed by a similar apparition who in turn had at his heels galloping brown shrouded native mounted users, with their rifles across their backs and the Lord only knew what intentions in their hearts.

Now, knowing something of the Tangier district, it was not long before I became surprised at the route we were following. We had skirted the main part of town and had reached the beach, which here curves around Tangier Bay for a dozen miles; but in the middle of the crescent is the River Halk; a tidal river. While we had been skirting the town I had been sure that we must be headed for one of the two only roads out of town; that is, the Fez road, which runs south; or the Tetuan road, which runs east. We passed the Fez road, however, and I decided it was to be Tetuan. But in turn we passed the Tetuan road and reached the beach and started for the Halk River. As we were crossing the sand dunes which lie above the beach I became conscious of a peculiar warm wind coming from the east. With almost every leap of my horse it seemed to increase in strength. By the time we had reached the beach it had grown stiff, was throwing up whitecaps in the bay, the mutter of which reached my ears.

Once upon the beach there was no need longer to ride in single file. I spurred my horse and overtook Brandon Grey. By the time I had done so we had covered an arc of the beach crescent, bringing the wind more into our faces. I felt the sharp sting of beach sand it had picked up.

"*Shurgy!*"* I shouted as I raced alongside of Brandon Grey. He did not answer. We raced on, curving along the beach, more and more the wind in our faces. Now it was a gale. Upon it came not only blinding sand but little pebbles which cut. There was a booming across the bay; the waves broke angrily. Our horses shook their heads in the fusillade of pebbles. I drew my hat down over my eyes to protect them.

"Where," I shouted, "are we going?" Not, I admit, that it made very much difference, but I knew this: there was no road off the beach between where we were and the Halk River, nor was there anything between where we were and the river except beach and sand dunes. Manifestly then, we were heading for the Halk River—and I noted that the tide was in.

"To Anghera!" Brandon Grey shouted back at me. His voice came unevenly, the wind seemed to twist it, to tear the words to pieces. I caught two more words. "Wait—river——"

We raced on. The pressure of the wind grew greater and greater. I felt myself pushed backward in the saddle by its force. It became a miniature sandstorm. My eyes, my nose, my mouth, were full of sand. My face, and hands and wrists burned with the sting of pebbles. Even through my clothing I could feel their impact. And my horse felt them, too. Now and then he would swerve abruptly and snort angrily. Thus like devils unchained we galloped through that constantly increasing hail of sand, that constantly hardening wall of wind until abruptly I almost crashed into Brandon Grey, who drew his horse to his haunches on the bank of the River Halk. He turned as I reached him.

"Now where?" I shouted. I'll swear he grinned.

"Is this Anghera?" he shouted.

I knew it wasn't, of course. I knew that Anghera lay on the other side of the river.

Brandon Grey drew his horse nearer to me.

"We are going," he shouted—I knew he was shouting, although his voice was little louder than a whisper in the bellow of the wind and the hiss of the sand—"we are going to the village of El-Menar, where I hope to capture a man I want. You said you were game."

I looked at the disturbed water of the river which it was his apparent intention to cross.

"I am," I declared. And I almost added, "But this is a hell of a night for a party. How come," I added as an afterthought, "*you* want a man?"

"All proper," he said. "I hereby deputize you. Secret Service of the Sultan. Let's go."

He spurred his horse into the water, was immediately up to his knees in the stream. I followed, after watching him a moment, and when I felt the presence of the three native riders behind me waiting for me to move. The water reached my knees; I saw that it was up to Brandon Grey's saddle. I laughed at the picture we must have made then. Two gentlemen in evening dress in Texas saddles in the middle of the Halk River in a sandstorm. The river was deepest on the side we had entered.

*"Shurgy" means "east."

Brandon Grey began to emerge from the water. I felt it receding down my legs. The horses snorted and splashed; I cast a look behind me and saw the nearest native riding with a rifle held over his head in one hand and his *djellaba* pulled up around his shoulders by the other. He waved his gun at me and shouted words which the wind swept away from me.

Shortly I heard the hoofs of Brandon Grey's horse thudding on solid ground and my own beast lurched up the river bank. We raced away again over the beach until we were within perhaps a mile of the little round tower, Torre Blanquillo, which squats sentinel-like upon a point overlooking the bay. There we turned sharply toward the hills, and in a few moments had left the roar of the *shurgy* and the bombardment of the sand and pebbles behind us.

Chapter II

BELABBAS MAKES A DASH

I DON'T know just where we were joined by other riders; suddenly I perceived that our group of five had been augmented to twice that number. I did not see them, but I could feel their presence, could hear the increased thudding of horses' hoofs, the increased clanking of metal accoutrements, the increased creaking of leather, and I knew that the rifles had now been unslung from brown backs and were carried across the saddle bows.

We mounted the western slope of the hills and tumbled down into the valley beyond. At this moment the first rays of the moon began to throw their silver light into the valley. We topped the elevation in the east, beyond which, I knew, lay the village of El-Menar, our destination.

As we crossed the valley I could see that my perception of the increase in the number of our followers had been correct. The rocky path of the hills gave way in the valley to silent earth; we crossed with little noise and drew to a halt within the shadow of the somewhat precipitous eastern hills. There Brandon Grey halted, swung from his saddle and gave the order to dismount. One of the natives seized the bridle reins of his horse and my own and led them to where the horses of the other riders were being picketed.

"On foot from here," Brandon Grey told me. And, as we waited, apparently, until the horses should all be properly secured, he explained a little further.

"This man Belabbas," he told me, "who I understand is lying in hiding tonight in El-Menar, is a bad egg. A son-of-a-gun. It's my job to catch him because, as I told you, I am of the Sultan's Secret Service. More than that, *amigo*, I'm the head of it. But don't pass that word on. And this Belabbas has a cute little game by which he hopes to put upon the throne in place of the present Sultan a fellow who is known as Mulai Mohammed. Mulai Mohammed claims to be the elder brother of the Sultan and the rightful heir to the throne. He isn't, and my job is to protect the present monarch, Mulai Abd-el-Aziz. This man Belabbas is engineering the thing for Mulai Mohammed. He is here in the north now, trying to stir up Anghera and the rest of the district. I have been watching some of his agents in Tangier. I have had my own spies out, and one of them brought the news that Belabbas was in El-Menar. He may be."

"He won't be taken," I suggested, "without a fight, naturally."

"I don't think that he has any of his own followers with him," answered Grey. "If he is in El-Menar it means that he has converted the village to his way of thinking and is relying upon the El-Menaris for protection. There won't be more than forty or fifty men to contend with. The surprise attack is the equal of treble forces."

"All is ready, Sidi," a native announced in a husky voice.

"*M'zien*," answered Grey, "let us go. Lead the way, Idrees."

The native, barefooted now, I observed, started off up the hill at a smart pace. Brandon Grey followed and I followed him. We went very quietly, following the well marked path, and as I was walking almost in the footsteps of my fellow-countryman, the road needed little of my attention. I had time to think.

It was rather amazing to find myself here, bent upon such a mission. At noon of this day I had been in very much civilized and very much governed Gibraltar, where people did only the things that they were permitted to do day by day in accordance with the official government bulletin. Now at moonrise of this same day I was climbing across an African hill behind the chief of the Sultan's Secret Service and a file of dark faced Berber fighting men, all of us intent upon raiding a

native village and carrying off from its protection a man who plotted the creation of a new Sultan.

Within the next hour other strange things would happen; some of these feet which now toiled up the hill might not go down the hill again; the rifles upon these brown backs behind me would speak and would be answered by other rifles and perhaps on one of the shrieking bullets my own name would be written. In an hour perhaps history would be written; for I could easily perceive, through my knowledge of the temperament of the Moroccan people, that Belabbas in death or captivity might eliminate a real menace to the throne, that Belabbas at liberty might reorganize the empire; for the hold of the present Sultan upon his people was not strong.

But strangest of all, it seemed to me, was that my old friend Brandon Grey should be the man to hold the fate of empire in his hands. Again I had to smile at the mental picture of this ambassador of fate, with the water of the Wad-el-Halk dripping from his shapeless trousers and mingling with the yellow dust of the Anghera hills, making his way insouciantly in a boiled shirt to attack a native village and wrest from half a hundred fighting men the person of, as Grey had put it, that son-of-a-gun, Belabbas.

I have found that adventure always comes in smiling guise, never as a terrifying phantom. One goes singing, a little trick of fate and the dark wings are heard above; they pass and one goes again upon one's way singing. And I have noted, too, that those who seek for adventure are those who find the least of it, whereas those who want none of it, upon them is it thrust by perverse destiny. Truly, as I have written at the start of my narrative, it is the key of chance that opens the door to adventure—the key of chance, and never the jimmy of intention.

We came then to the top of the hill and halted. I perceived that a sort of plateau or mesa spread before us and that at a distance which I judged to be less than a quarter of a mile, a single yellow light shone. About it was a sort of silver sheen which I knew to be caused by the moonlight shining upon the great flat cactus leaves of the wall which surrounds almost every native village.

The moonlight was unfortunate for us, but this evil was overcome by the fact that upon our right was a chain of minor hills and at the foot of this ran a shallow canyon.

The native addressed by Brandon Grey as Idrees called attention to this gully, and to the fact that it ran from where we had halted to a point far beyond the village of El-Menar. All we had to do to escape the revealing moonlight was to reach this gully. And then to follow it to our destination.

We did this, Idrees in the lead. I was amazed at the silence with which we traveled, until I realized that the natives had removed their slippers and were carrying them on their backs in the hoods of their *djellabas*. The only sound seemed to come from the contact upon the stones of the gully of the evening slippers worn by Brandon Grey and myself. And before we reached the village, I reflected, grimly, we would both be as barefooted as those brown men who followed us.

The wind was from the east, so that our little noise was held back from the village, and more important still, our scent was not carried to the noses of the village dogs.

THE yellow light drew closer and closer; we drew near enough to see that it was a lantern hanging on a post at the entrance to the village, passed it, and halted again. Now Brandon Grey took the lead from Idrees. Gave a brief command to follow, and climbing out of the gully led swiftly toward the gate where hung the light. I followed, gained his side, noted that he had drawn his pistol, and drew mine.

"There is only one gate, of course," he flung at me as we strode along. We reached the gate.

"Two men on guard here," snapped Grey. "The others come with me."

Now a dog barked, and another dog, and a dozen. Voices called. There was the sound of movement within the dozen thatched roof huts ranged around a central opening, sort of a public square, necessarily small, because the entire village was contained within walls of cactus which did not enclose more than three or four acres of land.

Grey led swiftly to the center of this opening. A match flared in his hand and I saw him applying it to a thing that reminded me of a Roman candle such as we use on the Fourth of July. The thing sputtered, and bending over, Grey thrust it into the ground. Suddenly it burst forth in a glaring blue light which illuminated the village from end to end. As this light

burst forth the man Idrees shouted an order and the dozen natives formed a hollow square facing toward the four sides of the village. Thus every house, and whoever came from them, was under the sights of their rifles.

It requires no effort of the imagination to conceive that the simple natives of El-Menar must have been startled half out of their wits by the sudden glare which flooded the village and which must have penetrated many a crack and cranny of their houses with its ghastly light. Nor that when, tumbling out of bed to seek the cause of this magical illumination they should see against the infernal glare the black silhouettes of the riflemen facing them wherever they might be. Doors were thrown open and half clad village men stood in the doorways, blinking and open mouthed; here and there a wide eyed woman peered over her man's shoulder and then ducked back with a shriek; children began to cry and the multitude of village dogs, apparently startled into a momentary silence, voiced their objections.

"To the headman's house!" Brandon Grey called over his shoulder to Idrees.

This house, easily distinguishable because it was a little larger than the others and had a little more space about it, stood on the east side of the square. We went swiftly toward it, but before Brandon Grey's upraised pistol muzzle had time to fall upon the door, it was opened and a big brown man stood scowling at us. A man becomes headman because he is less easily disturbed, or because he has quicker perceptions than the others. Djellali, this headman, must have observed us from within the house; now he addressed us hoarsely.

"Who are you and what do you want?" he demanded.

Brandon Grey lowered the pistol until it covered the headman.

"Who I am does not matter," snapped Grey. "What I want does matter. I want your guest, Belabbas."

It must have seemed strange to Djellali to have a foreigner in evening dress, backed by fireworks, demanding the person of Belabbas in very forcible and correct Arabic. His scowl deepened.

"You are a dog of a Christian," he said. "Go away."

"Those men whom you see there with rifles are not dogs of Christians," returned Grey. "Nor are the bullets in their guns Christians."

"In whose name," growled Djellali, "do you thus descend upon my village at night with armed men?"

"In the name, Diellali," answered Grey, "of His Majesty, the Sultan—and the pistol you perceive in my hand. Bring forth Belabbas."

"Who is this Belabbas that you talk about? Belabbas—Belabbas—I know no Belabbas!"

"Ignore the name then," demanded Grey, "but bring forth your guest."

"I have no guest," denied Djellali.

"Come forward then, that I may enter," said Grey.

The big fellow looked from Grey's eyes to the pistol, to me, to Idrees standing with rifle ready beside me.

"As you wish," he said then, and took one step forward.

"Guard him, Idrees," ordered Grey, "and be——"

Just what happened in the next thirty seconds it is hard to tell in that length of time. I think that Djellali swept his huge arms together, throwing Grey and me against each other, and then against Idrees. I know there was a breath in which I felt myself thrown into contact with others, in which I inadvertently pulled the trigger of my automatic; I know that from the darkness of the doorway behind Djellali there leaped a man clad only in shirt and drawers, who as he leaped thrust Djellali up against us again. Djellali recoiled and threw himself backward into his house as Grey fired toward the fugitive.

"Belabbas," shouted Grey. He moved his pistol a little—cursed and lowered the gun. For Belabbas had done an unlooked for thing: he had dashed straight toward the muzzles of the rifles of the men held upon him from the hollow square in which the light still flared. Quick witted he was, apparently, for in keeping in a line between us and the riflemen he rendered it impossible for either side to fire at him. We could not shoot because, had we missed, we should assuredly have struck the men forming the square. And they in turn did not dare to fire upon him because we were directly in their line of fire.

Almost before I had fully comprehended the strategy of his action, I saw two rifles raised in the air like clubs, and then saw the two holders of the rifles go spinning as Belabbas dashed between them. And the next thing I saw was Belabbas stooping in his run to pick up the blazing torch in the center of the square holding it aloft for a moment while he grinned about him. He had reason to grin because in the center of

that square he was again perfectly safe from the rifles which surrounded him. Even he thrust the lighted end of the torch against the ground, and darkness came like a thunderclap upon the village.

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK MAGICIAN

IN THE sudden darkness, doubly dense because of the vast brilliance of the flare, the man we sought made his escape. The explanation of the guards we had left at the gate was that they had been staring at the light and that when it ceased to be they were suddenly smitten blind, so blind that they could not even perceive the light of the lantern near them, let alone the figure of the being which they heard rush past them. Brandon Grey was more philosophical about Belabbas' escape from his hands than I had expected he would be.

"Elsewhere if not here," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Either at Nashipur or Babylon," he paraphrased.

This was after lanterns had been brought and our riflemen stationed around the headman's house, of which Grey had taken possession.

With that he dismissed the matter and turned his attention to the headman, Djellali, who was lying groaning upon his pallet with one hand clutching a brown leg, through which a bullet—my own, I judged—had passed.

My friend stared coldly for a little while at the groaning man, who avoided returning the look. Then he called Idrees and commanded that three riflemen be brought in. They crowded through the door almost before the order was given.

"Now," commanded Grey, "stand that man up against the wall."

Obediently Idrees bent over Djellali, seized the big man by the arm and commanded him to stand. For a moment it looked as though the headman was going to put up a fight, but after he had looked into the cold eyes of Brandon Grey, and at the three rifles which were now leveled at him, he rose with a grunt and Idrees shoved him back against the wall. The riflemen, understanding, raised their rifles; the hammers clicked as they were pulled back by brown thumbs.

Now a Mohammedan does not fear death, especially at the hands of a Christian, because Paradise awaits him. But, without fearing death, he may greatly crave life. In other words, if death must be met, let it be met without fear; but if it does not have to be met, so much the better. I observed that Brandon Grey understood this difference, this trick of the native mind. Because he did not threaten Djellali with death; but spoke to him of the pleasure of living, of eating and drinking and breathing, and watching his children grow up, and tilling his farm and hunting, and the undoubted opportunity of gaining more and more favor in the eyes of Allah by acts of grace. In short, by emphasizing life he put a terrible emphasis upon death. And so, at last, it was Djellali who asked Brandon Grey what he wanted, instead of Brandon Grey demanding a thing from Djellali.

"A trifle of information," answered Grey. "One word which you know from Belabbas. One word only in exchange for all the pleasure of living."

"And that word?" Djellali looked now at Grey, puzzlement crinkling his brow and forehead.

"The name of the place where the one called Mulai Mohammed lies in hiding."

Djellali stared defiantly, valiantly in silence, but he lowered his eyes at last.

"I am, of course, aware that Belabbas had told you," Grey said in reply to that movement.

But Djellali shook his head, trying to raise his eyes again to meet Grey's stare; and failing, stared at the ground.

"Well, it is too bad," Brandon Grey murmured, "because in that case—" Abruptly a childish voice cried out in the doorway and a little boy of perhaps five years, owlish eyed under the hood of a little white *djellaba*, pushed past the riflemen, ran to Djellali, and seized the big man's hand.

"What are you doing, father?" he asked.

The eyes of Djellali looked down into the eyes of the boy, his face hardened with resolution, then softened with something else: he flung back his head, returned Brandon Grey's look.

"Arzila," he muttered.

Brandon Grey nodded and with a motion of his hand sent the riflemen away.

"You are wise, Djellali," he told the headman. "Wise because you at last came to see that the child there is more important than the aspirations of Mulai Mohammed." His voice grew sterner. "But do not shelter Belabbas again—nor any other of his kind."

"That is understood, Sidi," said Djellali. "Nevertheless, I do believe that Mulai Mohammed should be Sultan."

"The opinion hurts no one," Grey told him. "Think as you will—but do not shelter traitors." He turned, looked at me, and we went outside. Idrees stood by the doorway awaiting orders.

"Your house, Idrees, is it not near the Fez gate in Tangier?" Grey asked the native.

"Yes, Sidi," responded Idrees.

"Summon your men then, and let us ride for there at once, and swiftly."

THE *shurgy* had died down somewhat and it was now at our backs so that the ride back to Tangier was made more swiftly and with less discomfort. Also, the river was lower now, so that we did not get so wet. And so within an hour we drew rein at a little isolated house in the Suani, south of Tangier, where Idrees lived. Our riflemen sought rest in a big courtyard, Idrees threw open the door of the house and bade us enter, and then excused himself to go and see what food was available. I took advantage of this opportunity to question Grey.

"What now?" I asked.

Not that I didn't think I knew; I judged that we would have some refreshment and a little rest at Idrees', then return to Grey's house on the Marshan. Probably on the morrow, I reflected, my friend would start out for Arzila, forty miles down the coast; and that I should probably ride with him. But he had a different idea.

"Why," he said, "as soon as we have something to eat and attend to another little matter or two, we shall start for Arzila."

A forty-mile ride at night—after our ride to El-Menar and back!

"You are joking," I said, although I knew he was not.

"Not on your life. The chances are that Belabbas is already on his way—or rather, that he will be on his way as soon as he can walk in from Anghera and get a horse. And I propose to reach there first, not only to prevent him from warning Mulai Mohammed, but to try again to catch him."

"But," I objected, "would he believe that Djellali would divulge Mulai Mohammed's hiding place?" That seemed to me improbable.

"He might not think he would," answered Grey, "but he might fear he would; at any rate that would be the only thing he would have to fear."

"I don't think myself that Djellali would have told you if the child had not entered when he did."

"Nor I," agreed Grey. "Sheer luck."

Again, I thought, the key of chance had opened another door.

"And so we ride to Arzila—now—and in these clothes?"

Brandon Grey laughed as he surveyed my bedraggled figure and no doubt woebegone face.

"Not so," he answered. "In half an hour two beggars with ragged *djellabas* will be on their way to Arzila. Those beggars will be Philip Dale and Brandon Grey."

Matters eventuated as he had said. We ate of Idrees' *kesk'soo* and baked chicken and luscious grapes, drank many cupfuls of sweet tea, and then, discarding the garments of super-civilization, donned beggar's rags. Dirt from the roadway on our hands and arms and faces, ashes from the fire-pots rubbed into our tousled hair, filthy bandages wrapped around his neck and both my forearms, dilapidated slippers upon our feet, we looked like two remnants of misery.

"Why," I asked, "don these things here? Why not wait until we get to Arzila?"

"One can ride as well in these as in any other garments," Grey explained. "Moreover, we must pass on foot through the city; horses will be waiting for us on the other side."

And so it came about that we were passed through the eastern gate by a night watchman who grumbled at being aroused by a couple of beggars, but who let us through, nevertheless, and we took up our journey through the sleeping city.

Just after we passed the mosque of Hulai Hassan, Brandon Grey pointed to a barred and shuttered window in the second story of a house upon our right hand.

"That," he said, "is where lives the famous El Habib, the Black Magician, Master of Innumerable Djinns. Quite a character." He chuckled.

As if in answer to his whispered words, as we reached a door set deeply into the wall of the house he had pointed out, the door opened and the moonlight fell upon a vast figure standing on the threshold. A vast black figure of a Sudanese negro, swathed in black garments. His chin and forehead and cheeks and nose seemed of silver where the moonlight struck them.

"Here a moment, beggars," he said softly. "I have alms for you."

It struck me that this was not so good, and that Grey would probably ignore the summons. Wherefore I shuffled steadily along the cobbles until my companion stopped me with a hand upon my arm and pulled me toward the doorway.

"You are dumb. Say nothing," he whispered under his breath. And then in Arabic he whined, in the voice of the beggar the world over, "Alms, Sidi. Alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate," and went up to the big negro, I tagging at his heels. He thrust out a dirty paw and repeated his solicitation.

I was watching the magician. I saw the moonlight shatter on his face as it wrinkled into a grin showing his white teeth. The change startled me, but even more startling was the deep guffaw of laughter which followed the grin.

"So! So!" he said, having rid himself of the guffaw. "So we have two beggars who are going on a journey; a long journey; as far, I think, as—let us say—Arzila." My knees nearly let me drop. But Grey was of sterner stuff.

"Alms, Sidi," he whined. "Alms." I had to admire his nerve, and while doing so realized that I was standing with open mouth staring at the Black Magician as at a ghost.

"Yes," he continued, "to Arzila, I think. Good. And instead of alms I will give you something worth more than alms. Yes, assuredly worth more than many alms. I mean advice. And that advice is to take note of the fifth house on the right hand side of the street beyond the Tangier gate of Arzila." He guffawed again, then quieted as suddenly as he had laughed. "And," he went on, "being a magician, naturally I make charms of value. I have one for you. It is better than alms."

Into Brandon Grey's still outstretched hand he laid what appeared to be a little square of folded paper, bent the fingers over to hold it.

"This charm," he said, "may bring good fortune to two beggars in Arzila. Guard it, and go your way with Allah." He stepped back, drew the door half closed. "But wait. I have forgotten to say—" there was a chuckle in his voice—"I have forgotten to tell you that that charm, although it is good against all evil, should be particularly good against—" I heard the concluding phrase through the swiftly narrowing opening of the door—"against one calling himself Mulai Mohammed."

The door closed, a bolt grated. Brandon Grey looked at me, and I looked at Brandon Grey.

"Hmph!" uttered Brandon Grey.

It seemed to me that that did not cover the situation.

CHAPTER IV

BY THE TANGIER GATE

THE uncanny knowledge and mysterious words of the Black Magician were a jolt to Grey, I think, even more than to me. My astonishment was due chiefly to the man's apparent knowledge of our mission, to his weird recognition of us in our beggar's rags, to the fact that he appeared to have been waiting in the doorway for us to pass; in short, I was aghast that anyone should have possessed such knowledge as he seemed to possess. That he had secured it through magic and *djinns* I was almost ready to believe.

The effect, however, upon Grey—I had to judge this from his occasional mutterings addressed not to me, but to himself—seemed to be different. Apparently he saw behind the Black Magician's operations something bigger than I was able to perceive. And when, in a sheltering nook, he paused to light a match and inspect the charm which El Habib had given him, I was disappointed at what he did not say. He held the match and folded paper so I might see—and all I saw was a tangle of arabesque lines shaped roughly like an outspread hand—and then grunted something unintelligible and started off.

Nevertheless, El Habib did not change our plans. We found Idrees waiting with horses as he had been instructed, and morning found us squatting upon the cobbles at the side of the street just within the Tangier gate of Arzila. We had dismounted before daybreak outside the walls, and Idrees had led our horses to the southern gate where, upon its opening, he was to enter and put the beasts into some convenient *fonda* or caravanserai. And when the gate had been opened by the city guard we had made our way through in a group of countrymen gathered to attend market-day, and had taken up our seat by the side of the road to raise our voices now and then in a duet of *"Alarbi—alarbi!* Alms—alms!" and to watch for Belabbas.

I had visited Arzila once some years

before, and had thought then what a magnificent sanctuary it would be for a bandit gang, or as the headquarters for a revolution. It is a walled town several square miles of massed buildings surrounded by red sandstone walls fifty feet high in some places, and almost as thick. These walls, I knew, were honeycombed with secret passages and forgotten rooms which the superstitious natives had sealed up and forgotten because of their fear and belief that evil spirits dwelt therein.

Time was when a hundred thousand people had their homes in Arzila; now I knew the population to be not over two thousand. Which meant, of course, that thousands and thousands of the residences—each one of which joined on to others, so that the whole town, it might be said, was almost under one flat roof—were deserted and falling into decay.

I had thought to myself when in Arzila before that an army could be hidden in the ruins, and another army in the secret chambers of the great wall, did fear of spirits not deter them from opening the passageways. It occurred to me now, as I squatted there beside Brandon Grey, almost under the feet of passing pedestrians and beasts of burden, that men like Belabbas and Mulai Mohammed were far less superstitious than the common citizen, and I suspected that what I had thought of the advantages of Arzila for revolutionary purposes had also occurred to others. Wise men, I have noticed, control the ignorant because they lack superstition, which is to say, conventions.

I had not forgotten the admonition of El Habib not to ignore the fifth house on the right hand side of the street. inside the gate. We were seated in front of the third house on the left hand side, wherefore the house in question was plainly visible. Perhaps I should say that the fifth door was plainly visible, for that was the only indication of an individual residence existing independently behind the solid wall of the street. There happened to be no irregularity of roof heights here to indicate different buildings, only the blank yellow wall with iron studded doors set deeply into it, and an occasional foot-square airhole up near the roof line. What was behind the wall which surrounded the fifth door I could not guess. No inspiration came from its blank face. It looked just like all the rest of the street. In this veiling of house faces as well as of women's faces, is one of the mysteries of Morocco. The door, while I watched, did not open, nor did anyone even pause before it.

We had sat there, I judge, almost two hours, and Belabbas had not come.

"He must have beaten us," muttered Grey, leaning toward me. This was the first word he had uttered for an hour and the second time only that he had spoken since we had sat there. Apparently he [illegible] I needed no instruction, but it did seem obvious that when Belabbas rode through the gate the thing to do was to follow him. But as I say, no Belabbas came; and I was mentally agreeing with Grey's words when, casting another look at the fifth door, I saw the figure of an *askari*, a native soldier, leaning against it.

Now, *askaris* infest all the towns of Morocco. They are no more uncommon than policemen in an American town, and like policemen, they have a right to lean up against things as they are inclined. Nevertheless, I watched this fellow, who was quite typical of his caste. He was brown, wore the red fez, red coat and baggy yellow pantaloons of the *askaris;* was bare legged, with his feet in worn yellow slippers, and he carried a rifle. I started to call Grey's attention to him, stopped because it seemed useless; then did so suddenly because the door had opened a little ways and the *askari* had slipped inside.

"I saw him," answered Grey, "just as he disappeared. Did you see his face? Was it Belabbas?"

But I had to confess that on the preceding night Belabbas' face had passed me too rapidly, in a scene of too much confusion for me to take note of it, except for the fact that it bore, if my impression was correct, a short but thick black beard.

"The *askari* had a short beard," I told Grey. "Belabbas did also, didn't he?"

"Yes," answered Grey. "There is no question but what Belabbas would have arrived by this time and no question but that he would come. Therefore the *askari,* I think, is Belabbas. Let us go."

Chapter V

THE FIFTH HOUSE

"GUNS for the lion, a snare for the birds," said Grey. We had left the gate and the fifth house behind us, had turned off the main thoroughfare into a little canyon-like side street scarcely four feet wide and half

covered by the second stories of houses projecting over it, had come to a doorway which had opened almost instantly upon receiving a repeated series of taps from Grey's knuckles, and had entered to be greeted by an old white whiskered manservant who manifestly recognized my friend, in spite of his disguise. This was one of the houses which, Grey explained, later, he kept in almost all the important towns, ready to receive him at any hour and in any guise in which he might appear. Now he was engaged in changing his clothes, during which operation he talked to me more than he had talked since the beginning of our adventure.

"Yes," he repeated, "guns for the lion, a snare for the birds. In El-Menar Belabbas was a lion, to be captured if possible by force. Here he is a bird, as is also Mulai Mohammed, his master; to be snared. Allah only knows the extent of Mulai Mohammed's organization here, the number of his followers. I have a suspicion, true—enough of a suspicion to emphasize the need of guile instead of force—although it is also true, I might raise some little force of my own in case of need."

While he spoke we were exchanging the rags we had worn for the uniforms of *askaris*, government soldiers. There was this difference. Grey's uniform was that of captain of *askaris*, whereas mine was that of the common soldier.

"This Mulai Mohammed," he continued, "who desires to become Sultan, is without question not Mulai Mohammed at all. Who he is I do not know—at least not definitely. But I do know that Mulai Mohammed indubitably was executed five or six years ago, by the then regent, for fomenting an uprising."

"How then," I asked, "does this pretender manage to get by? Certainly there must be many people who know Mulai Mohammed."

"He is clever," answered Grey. "He uses two stunts to protect himself on this point. One is that his face is never seen except, I imagine, by those who are his chief co-plotters; always when he appears before his lesser followers, or those whom he would convert to his cause, his face is covered like a woman's. In this way he keeps from being recognized as *not* being Mulai Mohammed. Secondly, as it must be believed that he is Mulai Mohammed, despite the covering of his face, he exposes his breast and shows thereupon a strange birthmark which it is common knowledge defaced the breast of Mulai Mohammed. Faked, of course. But it serves its purpose well. It is a birthmark about the size of a child's hand and so shaped."

"Like the shape of the charm the Black Magician—" I began.

Grey swung around to stare for a moment.

"By George! That hadn't struck me!" he exclaimed. "Now I wonder—" He continued his dressing.

"But how is it," I asked, "that if Mulai Mohammed was executed, this charlatan can find people who believe him to be what he claims?"

"Easily enough, in this country. Easily enough. I don't know of a single pretender who has been executed, who has not been followed by another pretender claiming to be him. Take Bu-Hamed, for example. He died at the point of a rifle in the hands of the Sultan himself. Nevertheless, within six months a large number of people had been convinced either that he had never been captured, or that the Sultan's bullet had not been fatal and that he had managed to make his escape.

"After all, the Moroccans are not very much different from us Americans, Phil. With us the newspapers and demagogues tell us an untrue thing until we believe it; in this country pretenders and holy men and plotters take advantage of the same gullibility of the public mind. And another thing to be thought of is that it doesn't really make any difference whether or not a pretender actually is who he claims to be, so long as he is what he is; namely, a leader of revolution against the Sultan. The fact that a man must be a shareef, a member of the Sultan's family, in order to be eligible to the throne, is the reason that the pretenders appear as brothers or uncles or other relatives of the reigning monarch instead of under their own names."

We had finished donning our uniforms now. Grey adjusted various details of mine, and then with a grin suggested that I might like to know what the next step was.

"If it is the Heaven-Born's wish," I answered, adjusting the shoulder holster beneath my arm a little better.

"It is then," Grey told me, "this. I am a captain of *askaris*, supported by you. We shall now call at the fifth door on the right hand side of the street of the Tangier gate, and there, in the name of the Government, enter in search of an *askari* who has committed a crime and who I have reason to

believe has sought refuge within the house."

"Belabbas," I said, nodding. "Providing he is still an *askari*."

"It will at least gain us entrance—perhaps," answered Grey. "And if Belabbas is there—" he broke off. "But Belabbas may not be by any means the biggest bird for our snare."

At this moment the old servant returned, a rifle in one hand, a saber in the other. At Grey's motion he handed the rifle to me and fastened the sword around his master's waist.

We marched forth, I two paces behind my captain, and very quickly came to the house of the fifth door.

Upon this door was an iron knocker, which Grey operated, raising echoes within.

We waited: no answer. Again he used the iron ring and again we waited.

"I hear slippers," whispered Grey, and raised his voice. "Open for the captain of *askaris*."

No answer. Now a little crowd had begun to assemble.

"OPEN," again called Grey, "or I summon the populace to break the door."

"Ay, we will help you, Sidi Kaid," spoke up a brown farmer, who, by the *assagai* in the back of his camel-hair *djellaba*, was a Berber mountaineer ready for a fight at any time on any side. "What has he done whom you seek?"

Grey took advantage of this inquiry. I judge that he suspected, as I did, that there were listeners on the other side of the door.

"I seek the arrest of an *askari* who has committed a crime and who has taken shelter here. Will you help me break down the door?"

"Ay, that we will, Sidi Kaid. That we will."

"Here are cobbles to beat upon it with."

"I have a stout club here," cried another.

And then the door, stopped by a chain within, opened some six inches. An evil brown, pockmarked face peeked out.

"What do you desire, Sidi?" it asked.

"Entrance," snapped Brandon Grey, shortly.

"But for what purpose?"

"You have heard. I seek an *askari* who has hidden himself here. Open."

"There is no *askari* here, Sidi Kaid," said the evil face.

With a swift motion my friend seized the rifle from my hand, swung it overhead and brought it down upon the chain stretched from door to door-jamb. It tore out of the rotten wood. The man behind the door tried in vain to close the portal, but could not because the gun-stock prevented. We threw ourselves against the door and forced it open. The crowd behind us set up a cheer. Grey closed the door and bolted it. We found ourselves in a long, dimly lighted hall at the end of which a large light room was distinguishable. Grey handed the rifle back to me with a motion to guard the man we drove ahead of us, and drew his saber. We heard a door slam as we strode toward the room ahead. There was nobody in the room, but two doorways opened from it. In one the door was open, showing another door at the end of a hall in the rear of the house. Grey threw open the other door. It was unoccupied. I looked about the main room, saw in front of one of the big floor cushions a little table gaudily painted, on which lay paper, bamboo pen and a bottle of ink. Grey picked up a sheet of the paper, studied it.

"Mulai Mohammed," he said, "was here, I think. Here is a letter he might have written. His signature is not on it, but the ink is not yet dry; it was not finished. Let us try the other door."

Even as we turned toward it a velvet hanging on the side of the hall leading to the door in question was thrown aside; a figure sprang into view, threw open the door and disappeared. It was the man in the *askari* costume.

We ran to the door, tried to pull it open, could not do so. A bolt on the other side held it. We were stopped. Brandon Grey growled and studied the door. Then again took the rifle from my hands and stepping back began to pump the heavy bullets into the oak. The gun was a .45-70, throwing a bullet which would stop a lion. Before its attack a hole appeared in the splintered oaken barrier. Brandon Grey returned the gun to me, reached a hand through the hole he had made, and pulled the bolt which held the door. He swung it open; a draught of cold, damp air struck us. We passed through the doorway and found ourselves in a stone walled and stone roofed and stone paved passageway, damp and fungus-grown.

We were inside the great wall of Arzila, with its unknown secret corridors and hid-

den chambers. The wall had swallowed up Belabbas and his master, the false Mulai Mohammed.

Suddenly we were in darkness, darkness following a loud crash. I turned to see the light behind through the hole which my rifle had splintered in the woodwork of the door. The door was closed. I heard a bolt thrown. As I sprang toward it I heard additional crashes against the door, realized that the man we had left in the room was piling against it any object which might prevent our opening it, even though we again used the rifle as a key. But the use of the rifle was unnecessary. I remembered that the bolt on that side of the door was located just below the hole we had created. I reached through it, pulled the bolt and threw myself against the door. But there was no give to it. Grey came to my aid, but our shoulders were of no avail, and even as we pushed, only managing to move the door a little at the top, that motion was stopped by a timber which was thrown against the portal.

Not only were Belabbas and Mulai Mohammed, and the Lord knew who else, within the city wall, but we two were also prisoners there, without food, without water, and without light.

CHAPTER VI

THE CRY IN THE DARK

THAT there was a way out, a way out which the men we sought had taken, was clear; but it was equally clear that we did not know that way, and that, should we happen to stumble upon it, we might find ourselves blocked by barred and immovable doors. It seemed to me highly probable, however, that if we wandered about in the darkness we would become completely lost. I could not help thinking that if this happened our world would never know of our fate.

It was true that many people had seen us enter the house, but it was probable that very few of them would await our coming out, and eventually those who waited the longest would go on their way, either because their affairs pressed, or because they feared that some event had occurred within the house which might get them into the hands of the law as witnesses. I could not help remembering the blank dead look of the fifth door in the wall. I imagined it still turning that same cold frown upon all passersby, hiding what went on behind it as a mask hides the features of a Chinese actor.

My thoughts had taken scarcely the time of two breaths; were interrupted by the voice of Grandon Grey asking if I had matches. There was no need to look. I remembered that I had none. I told him so.

"I have one only," he told me. "I remembered to slip my match box into my pocket, but there is only one match in it. We're out of luck. That one we will have to keep for an emergency. Now the problem is, not to get lost. Is your memory good?"

I told him it was, and asked why.

"Because," he explained, "we have got to remember every turn and the number of paces we take between each. If we had a light we could make note of them and it would be simple, but as it is, we have to remember them. And if we want to retrace our steps we will have to remember them backwards."

"That will serve for a little while," I agreed, "but not for long." An idea occurred to me. "What say we find a word or phrase which will have the same number of letters as there are paces between the turns? Words are more easily remembered than figures."

"Excellent," approved Grey. "We can make up a sentence which will have some meaning and thus easily remember it. Let's start. You trail your hand along the left hand wall, and I will follow the right. No telling on which side the turn will be." So we started, counting paces together—one—two—three——

We were, I realized, walking in a line across the wall, not following it longitudinally, and therefore we could not take many paces without finding a turn. As we had counted nine my hand slipped from the wall into space.

"Nine paces," I repeated, "and here's a turn. Is there one on that side?"

Grey proceeded a few steps and felt around and said there was not.

"A nine letter word, or phrase, then, to begin with," he said. I suggested the word "traveling."

"Correct," endorsed Grey, "and we make a left turn. Therefore we have to remember the words 'traveling left.' Now let's proceed."

Following the same method we passed down the longitudinal corridor until simultaneously the two of us said, "Stop!" We

had gone forty paces and at the same time had reached a cross passage.

"A phrase of forty words or letters then," began Grey—and fell silent, with a pressure on my arm which I understood. Slight as the sound was I had heard it also. The sound of men breathing, of men trying to breathe noiselessly.

We stood, it was clear, at an intersection of a passageway which ran parallel to the length of the wall, and one which cut across it, so that on each side of us in the lateral passageway was a short corridor, and in one of these corridors were human beings. Belabbas, the one calling himself Mulai Mohammed—probably others. But the strange part of it was that because of some peculiar acoustic property of the passageway, I could not determine on which side of us they were; the slight hiss of breathing seemed to come from both sides the same.

No doubt the men pursued knew that we were only two; there was no doubt in my mind that they intended to attack, but from which direction? Standing there with drawn pistol I seemed to hear their breathing behind me and before me as well as on either side. It was confusing. At this moment Grey's lips approached my ear. "I am going to use our only match," he whispered. "Be ready and watch the corridor on your left."

I heard the sound of a match striking, saw nothing in the corridor down which I was looking, and turned my head just as Grey's pistol roared. The two of us went down in a heap beneath our assailants, whose number I could not determine, which in fact I had no time to think about. My pistol had been knocked from my hand as I fell and I felt strong fingers seeking for my neck.

I fought back, rolled over, crawled a ways with the man on my back, twisted again. Then I felt a hard lump beneath my shoulder, reached for it and clutched my pistol. The hands were now at my throat. It was difficult to breathe, and I realized that the man was much more powerful than myself. Therefore without any other movement, I laid the barrel of my pistol upon my neck, pointing backward, and fired three shots as quickly as I could pull the trigger. The hands upon my neck relaxed, a great silence fell.

I scrambled to my feet and called to Grey. No answer. No motion. No sound. I took a step and my foot came in contact with a body. I felt for its heartbeat. There was none, but the man had a beard and so was not Brandon Grey. Probably he was the man I had shot.

I walked around in a circle, as I thought, but there were no more bodies, living or dead. I was alone in the passageway, and besides that, I realized with a sickening sensation that I was utterly lost as to direction; I could determine the cross passageway, all right, but I would not be able to tell which way we had come along the main corridor. What had become of Grey, of our assailants? The answer seemed obvious. The latter had taken Grey, dead or alive, into some other part of the great wall.

I am not ashamed to admit that my knees grew weak, that I sat down upon the cold damp stones and regretted that the key of chance had ever opened for me this particular door of adventure. Death by hunger or by thirst is bad enough when it occurs in company with a fellow-being; when it occurs in such a place as permits one to see the sun or the stars. But to be buried alive in a city wall, to starve and thirst in darkness and alone until death should relieve one's sufferings, was a thought which sapped such little courage as I had. Better the quick death which might be facing Brandon Grey at the hands of his enemies, than this!

But after a little I rose and in sheer desperation started off, leaving the question of route in the hands of fate. When I had gone some thirty steps I knew that I was in the longitudinal passageway, but did not know, nor care, whether it was leading me back toward the house by the Tangier gate, or away from it.

I continued on in utter blackness until a sharp cry brought me to a sudden halt. The cry seemed to come from a little distance ahead of me. But it was not a man's cry; it was the cry of a woman, or a girl.

I went forward, listening intently. Again came the cry, a cry of pain or fear, this time seemingly from the wall beside me. I passed my hands over the wall, thinking that possibly there was a door which I could not see. They came in contact with a heavy wooden framework in which were jagged projections of rusty metal. At first I thought I had found the door I had visioned there, but, feeling over it a little more, I realized that it was a window, once protected by an iron grill which had rusted away. Also I discovered that it was now closed by wooden shutters which gave slightly beneath the light pressure of my fingers.

And now the cry came again, followed

by a woman's frightened voice pleading in Spanish.

"*No es verdad, Francisco! No es verdad!*—It is not true, Francisco! It is not true! I swear that it is not true! Do not kill me, Francisco! Do not—" The words rose to another scream of terror. I pushed against the window shutters and they gave beneath the pressure. But no light came through them and I realized that a curtain or wall hanging concealed the old window. The woman's scream had died to a gurgle, and I pictured unpleasant things. Gun in hand I swung through the window, flung aside the curtain and stood up within the room.

A GIRL with loosened long black hair was bent backward over a man's knee; his fingers were on her throat, her mouth was open and her eyes were staring. The man was a Spaniard; dark, villainous looking, with a blood-red sash around his waist.

He had not heard me, did not know I was there until the barrel of my pistol descended upon his head. Probably he did not know I was there even then, because he fell unconscious to the floor, the girl rolling from his suddenly limp knee to lie beside him.

It was the work of a moment to unwrap the long red sash from the Spaniard's waist and to truss him up with it. But by the time I had done this the girl was on her feet and I turned to meet her stare of amazement—and something else—to see her amazement turn to fear as she looked upon the man who had tried to kill her. The look of fear turned to curiosity as she asked in Spanish, holding her swollen throat, whence I had come.

In answer I pointed to the window, which was visible because the shutters had remained open.

"I entered, señorita," I told her in her own language, "through a fortunate window, a window fortunate I think for both of us."

This reminded me that Belabbas and his men might still be in the passageway and I went to the window, closed the shutters and sought for a lock. There was none, so I let the curtain drop into place again and turned back to the girl.

"I thank you a thousand times, señor," she began, hesitantly. "But—but——"

I saw her eyes scrutinize me up and down, realized that I still appeared to be a native *askari*, and that for one of these stupid fellows to rescue a woman from danger was rightly a matter of surprise. Not that they are cowardly, but they have a very deep-seated belief in tending to their own affairs only and that Allah, without their assistance, will rescue from danger those whom he desires to be rescued.

While I was thinking thus I had time to notice that the girl was strikingly handsome in a Spanish way. She was, I judged, about eighteen years old, an age when a Spanish woman is in full blossom. Her long black hair fell disarrayed about her shoulders, and I noticed a perceptible curl in it. Her eyes were as black as her hair, which was utterly so. Her features were well formed, although unduly flushed now by her recent experience. And more than this, there was a look of intelligence in her eyes which many a handsome Spanish woman lacks.

I was in doubt as to my course of action. I realized that through the window I had entered a house built up against the city wall, that I was out of that dread, dark dungeon. But I had to go back in search of Brandon Grey. That had been my thought before I had found the window, before I had heard the cry. To get out of the wall, secure a lantern or candles and go back in search of my friend. But fate had ordained that I should gain my freedom by passing through the quarrel of another man and a woman. Of the man I had made a mortal enemy, or I did not know Spaniards. Of the woman—yes, that was true, too—of the woman I had made a mortal friend, or I did not know Spanish women. Even though I was only a Moorish *askari*, filthy from the dirt of the city wall, clothes torn by the fight therein, even thus the woman looked upon me with eyes of gratitude. I sought her eyes again to verify this and saw her staring wide eyed, not at my face, but at my shoulder.

"You—you are white, señor," she said. "And—" her eyes searched my face now—"your face is not the face of an *askari*. The color stops at your neck."

I drew my blouse together, understanding then that in my struggle some of the buttons had been torn off and thus the unstained flesh had been exposed. I resolved then not to attempt to carry the deceit further. Resolved to trust this woman, to have her aid me, as every moment was precious.

"You are right, señora," I began.

"Señorita," she corrected me. "Señorita Mona Valdez."

I did not reciprocate with my name. I bowed.

"It is true I am no *askari*," I told her, thanking the gods that I knew Spanish. "What I am does not matter. What does matter is that a friend of mine, who with me sought certain criminals in the passageways of the city wall, has been taken captive by them and carried off, I know not where. I myself was lost, having no light, until I heard your scream and found the window. Now if the señorita will be so kind as to supply me with light of some sort, a lantern or candles, I will go out of the window again and continue my search for my friend." I was suddenly reminded of the Spaniard by a groan which came from him.

"As for this man," I continued, "no doubt the Señorita Valdez has friends who will take care of him—and of her."

But at this the señorita shook her head.

"No, señor, no. I have no one. This pig here—" she looked with disgust upon the Spaniard—"he is my second cousin. He manages to rob me of the little property my dead father left me. He comes to Arzila from Spain on some business of which he tells me nothing. He brings me with him to keep house for him. He installs me here in this house. He goes about his private affairs leaving me alone day and night. Suddenly he flies into a rage and accuses me of—of—I know not what! But among many things of encouraging the attentions of some native swine. I think the fool is jealous. Anyhow, he tries, as you have seen, to kill me. And now I, like you, must make my escape from the city wall, or assuredly I shall die—after what has happened.

"Unless—" she paused and turned a look upon me which made me gasp—"unless you have a bullet in your pistol, or a knife in your belt, which will put a complete finish to my cousin's jealousy."

Amazing that the warmest blooded women in the world can also be the coldest blooded.

"Or," the girl continued, when I had shaken my head positively in refusal to carry out her plan, "or perhaps I had better do it myself, except that you will have to lend me a weapon, as my own knife was broken up by my cousin."

But this also I refused to do, flatly. I had as soon have killed the man myself as to have had her do it.

"In that case, then," said the señorita, shrugging her slim shoulders, "in that case, señor, I must go away at once. And you must help me."

I had to point out to her that much as I would like to do so, that cheerfully as I would do so if it were not for other matters—that I would do so later—there were matters which now demanded my instant attention, namely, the search for Brandon Grey.

"You will be safe," I told her, "as long as he is tied up. You can watch him, can tie him more tightly if you wish. And no doubt you can make arrangements to be carried to Tangier and then to Spain. If it is a question of money——"

"I have money enough," the girl answered. "But I am afraid to stay with him. Look you." She raised her voice. "You go in search of your friend. You need lights. Very well. I will supply the lights. I will go with you and carry them, leaving you free to fight. That is what I shall do. And then, when your friend is found, you will see that I get safely out of Arzila."

I repelled this suggestion. She insisted.

"But it is impossible," I said at last exasperated. "I cannot take you into such danger."

"No lights then," she said passionately. "Am I afraid of danger, after having lived with—that? Try me and see. Moreover, if you do not let me go with you I will follow you."

I was forced to cease protesting. The valuable minutes were flying, and what, after all, was this girl to me in comparison with Brandon Grey? If she insisted upon running into danger against my desires, let her do it.

"All right," I told her then. "Get ready, speedily, and let us begone. While you are getting lights I will more securely tie up your cousin."

This I did, while she went into another room, and incidentally I took from his pocket a small Spanish automatic which I handed to the girl when she returned with two native lanterns and a supply of matches and candles for them.

I opened the window and helped her through into the corridor. I followed, closing the shutters behind me, and then I struck a match to ignite the lanterns which she held.

While doing so I asked a question, out of mere curiosity, or perhaps only because I was thinking of Brandon Grey.

"Who," I asked, "was the native of whom your cousin was jealous?"

Her answer came like a thunderclap in the passageway.

"A man named Belabbas," she said.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

THE square candle lanterns we carried illuminated the passageway, which I now really saw for the first time. It was a corridor some six feet wide, I judged, and a third again as high, damp and mouldy in spots, dry and dusty in others. The floor of it was of stone slabs and the walls seemed to have been at one time covered with plaster, judging from the heaps of white dust which lay along their bases.

Our lanterns gave but little light, threw their yellow beams a distance of only a few yards; hence I moved forward slowly, watching the distant darkness for what might materialize out of it. I judged that I had gone thirty-five or forty paces when something did materialize; namely, a wall, in front of which a corridor turned off on each hand. Warning the señorita, I approached cautiously; similar lateral corridors had not long since held an ambush. Gun in hand I peeked cautiously around the corner. But the corridors were quite empty. Thereupon, faced by the blank wall, I investigated.

There was this peculiarity, however—that the passageway we were in came to an end in the lateral corridors, and the height of these, and of the opposing wall, seemed to be treble that of the passageway behind me. In other words the cross-wall which confronted me was like the side of a house built into the city wall—or the side of some big room which stretched completely across the barrier. We came out of our tunnel into an open space and ahead was a wall some twenty-five feet high, and, it appeared to me, almost the width of the city wall itself. In it I could perceive no door or opening of any sort. In my first examination, that was. As I walked along it the second time, in one corner I saw a glittering disc lying half imbedded in the crumbled mortar.

I fished it out and stared at it startled. It was an American silver dollar. That it had fallen from above was apparent. Therefore I looked up, lifting my lantern as high as I could, and a dozen feet above my head I distinguished a hole in the wall a couple of feet square.

Two and two combined with a click. Brandon Grey had passed here and the silver dollar had either fallen from his pocket or had been dropped from him with the thought that it might serve as a guide for me if I should search for him. And as I had found it in a corner of one of the lateral corridors, directly beneath the opening above my head, it seemed reasonable to suppose that my friend had passed through that opening to the other side of the wall.

But how?

I could conceive of several ways in which he and his captors—for I had no doubt that he was a captive—could have gained the opening. But these ways were closed to me at the moment. A rope might have been let down to them from the room beyond, or a rope ladder lowered. But I had neither rope nor ladder, and if I had possessed either one of these instruments I failed to see how I could have attached it to the opening above. Perplexed, yet vowing to pass that wall, I leaned back against the side of the corridor and raised my lantern in order to see as far into the hole as possible, to determine, if I could, how thick the wall before me was. Fortune favored me. From this angle I saw a yellow curve maybe a handsbreadth in length, which was undoubtedly a segment of rope. So, I thought, the rope or the ladder by which they ascend or descend is kept in that hole. Remained, then, for me to devise a scheme by which I could get hold of the piece of rope which I saw. Not a difficult task, providing I could find a pole and a bit of wire to fashion a hook out of. And naturally the only place these things were to be secured was in the house we had just left.

"Come," I said to the señorita, "we must go back to your house." I explained what I needed.

This was the first time I had spoken since we had reached the spot. My voice seemed strangely suppressed, thrown back upon my ears by the surrounding walls. The girl turned toward the passageway and I started to follow, when I heard my name called, as from a far distance. I recognized the voice, and in fact, there could be no one else who would so call my name.

"Grey!" I shouted. "Where are you?"

"The other side the wall," came the answer.

I moved back to my former position beneath the hole in the wall.

"Are you all right?" I asked him.

The answer floated back through the hole above my head.

"Not all right," he said, "but still alive. Get to me if you can."

"I am going to," I told him. "I am going now after the means wherewith to reach this hole in the wall. Are you tied up?"

"Worse than that," he answered. "I am not only tied up, but I am chained into a stone tub into which they have turned the water. It's some ancient torture chamber, I think."

I shuddered. The picture was vivid.

"But there is only a little water coming in," Grey continued. "It's intended to drip slowly."

"How long will it take—" I began, but could not finish. But Grey understood me.

"I have been trying to figure it," he called back. "I don't think it will reach my neck for twenty hours, perhaps more, perhaps less. I can only guess at it. Providing, of course, the water doesn't come any faster than it does now. Better bring a file or a saw when you come. And be careful, too, when you return. They may be here and I may be unable to warn you."

I AM going," I told him, and with the word I set off, quivering with horror at the thought of my friend's danger. To make it worse, if that were possible, I had read of this form of punishment and torture and death. It was psychological torture. A torture of the mind more even than of the body. In a stone basin, the sides rising higher than the victim's head, a man was shackled by chains fastened to the bottom of the tub. Two short chains held his hands down, two others passed over his knees. Thus the victim could not rise, could not move except perhaps to sway his body three or four inches.

Then the water was permitted to drip into the tub. After a little the pain of cramped muscles, of water-soaked flesh, of perception of the water rising with such terrible slowness, gave way to the horror of counting the drops as they fell. And at last after the mind had been torn by the inescapable count, it had to face that awful moment in which each globule of water became more and more deadly.

Yes, it was in haste that I led the way back to the señorita's house. The girl kept at my heels, followed me through the window and then gave a cry. Looking at her I saw her pointing to the corner of the room where I had left the Spaniard.

There was no Spaniard there. Even though I had tied him with no gentleness whatsoever, he was gone.

"Oh," cried the girl. "He has escaped! He will return and—and— Let us go, quickly. I am afraid."

"The quicker the better," I told her, thinking of Brandon Grey, and not of the Spaniard. He was unimportant. The thing to do with all speed was to gain access to the torture chamber where water dripped on Brandon Grey.

"A pole of some sort, girl," I told her. "And quickly. A bit of wire." I looked about the room and could see nothing that would serve. Realizing that I still held the lantern I set it down upon the floor; then noticed the wire handle by which I had carried it. Good. That would do for the wire perfectly. I tore it loose from the tin case.

"Look you, señor," the girl cried from another room into which she had gone. "Will this serve the purpose?"

I entered, and found her holding a good sized bundle of what at first I took to be brass curtain rods.

"Yes," I answered. "Yes, we can make them serve," and took them from her hand. Then I discovered that they were not curtain rods, but cleaning rods for rifles.

"Hmph! This is queer," I said. "These belong to your cousin?"

The girl nodded.

"Where there are cleaning rods for rifles there must be rifles," I told her. "Does your cousin, by any chance, sell rifles?"

The girl seemed embarrassed, hesitated. "Yes, señor. I—I think he does," she said at last. "I think that he has a connection with a factory in Barcelona."

I began to understand the presence of these two Spaniards in Arzila, where there were not, so far as I knew, half a dozen Europeans all told. That was what surprised me when I had come upon the girl. Now it seemed fairly certain that her cousin was selling contraband arms. And it suddenly flashed into my mind that contraband arms went very well with the revolution being planned by Mulai Mohammed and Belabbas, particularly as the Spaniard was sojourning in the town which was apparently Mulai Mohammed's headquarters. I decided, on the moment that the Spaniard was of some importance

after all; that the next time he fell into my hands I would see to it that he didn't escape.

Well, I had the wire necessary to make the hook and cleaning rods could be lashed together to form a pole. This would give me access to the torture chamber. But one thing more I needed, a file or a saw which would cut metal. Little chance to find such a thing here. The girl, when I told her of my need, shook her head.

"I am certain, señor," she said, "that there is no such thing in the house. I will look—we will search—but— Señor, there is nearby a shop of a worker in brass—a man who makes cups and trays and such things. He would have such an instrument, would he not?"

"Nearby, you say?"

"Oh, very near, señor," she answered. "I think it is but the third or fourth house beyond here."

"Good," I said. "I will go and get that which I need. Close the door and bolt it and be ready to let me in quickly when I return." I went to the door and laid my hand upon the latch. As I did so, it was flung open and the Spaniard plunged into the room with two scowling natives at his heels.

I jumped back and reached for the pistol which I had returned to the holster inside my jacket, but before I could grasp it the Spaniard was upon me like a tiger. He had a knife in his hand and I had immediately to abandon the attempt to reach my pistol in order to grasp the hand that held the knife. Fortunately I got the Spaniard by the wrist with my left hand and deflected his blow. Then I sent an uppercut to his chin which had all the strength I could transmit to it. But it failed of its objective. The Spaniard saw it coming, moved his head quickly, but not quickly enough to keep my fist from landing upon his jaw. He staggered. Even as I had struck with my right, I twisted his wrist sharply with my left and heard the knife tinkle on the floor. But before I could even think of picking it up the Spaniard leaped upon me, taking another blow as he did so, and overcoming my balance, bore me to the floor.

As we fell I remember seeing the two natives standing inactive just inside the door, and the señorita with the backs of her hands placed to her lips staring horrified. Then the blows which the Spaniard was raining upon my face prevented further attention to anything except them, and the thought of the knife which lay somewhere near us. I saw him glancing about, even as he rained blows upon my head; knew what he was looking for. Summoning all my strength I managed to throw him off of me, away from the knife. Rolling over, then, before he could recover I seized the weapon, turned to meet him on my knees, heard a cry from the señorita—and then a great blaze exploded in my head.

WHEN I regained consciousness, realization of what had happened came slowly. My eyes pained me so that I could scarcely raise the lids, but when I did so and saw the place where I was, I remembered. Unconsciously I tried to move. Consciously I perceived that I was bound so tightly that I could move nothing but my head. It seemed dark in the room; my eyes sought the windows, saw that it was darkening outside. And then remembrance of Brandon Grey crashed down upon me like a thunderclap. My fight with the Spaniard had taken place shortly after midday, I judged. It would soon be dark, and darkness did not fall early. I guessed it to be fully eight o'clock. Six precious hours at least had passed—for six hours Brandon Grey had been expecting aid that had not come—for more than six hours the interminable drip, drip of water in his tub had been going on.

A wave of rage succeeded the wave of despair which shook me. I strained at my bonds, twisted and turned—and failed to accomplish any loosening of them whatsoever. My head spun, lights flashed before my eyes at the effort. I lay quiet then for a moment thinking that it did no good to lose control of myself. No, the thing to do was to try to ascertain how my hands were tied and with what, and if possible, to set them free. Unless I could do so Brandon Grey would die. The Spanish girl had probably been carried away, perhaps killed; the ropes which bound my wrists spelled either life or death for my friend.

And so I concentrated upon those ropes. But I grew sick again when I discovered, by raising my head sufficiently to see, that each wrist was twice encircled by a stout rope, doubly knotted, and that the two wrists were connected by a rope which passed completely around my body, thus making it impossible for me to bring my

hands closely enough together so that one might fuss at the knots which held the other. There were ropes around my knees and around my ankles. These I saw, but did not feel, because my legs were numb. And finally I discovered that the rope which connected my wrists and encircled my body was so fastened to the floor as to prevent my turning.

I recalled the manner in which I had roped the Spaniard, and of how he had apparently escaped with ease. And I remembered, too, that the bony structure of some men's hands is such that they cannot be manacled; that they may withdraw their hands through a manacle no larger than their wrist. I knew the trick of expanding one's muscles when one is being bound so that when the muscles are relaxed the bonds will be loose. But of this knowledge I had had no opportunity to make use.

I also remembered bitterly that my hands were none too small, even for a man. And after all these considerations I would not have given a Chinese *cash* for my chance of escape—or for Brandon Grey's chance for life. I am something of a fatalist, but never until that moment did I realize the shallowness of fatalism. The impossibility of it when every particle of body, mind and spirit cries out that a thing shall not be!

I wondered that the Spaniard had not killed me outright. That assuredly had been his intention when he had attacked me with the knife. What had happened after that attack, could not so far as I could see, make him desire to be more lenient. Perhaps he had some use he intended to make of me; perhaps he had discovered the white skin beneath the shirt and jacket and had held his hand in order to try to unravel that mystery. Or perhaps, if the white skin had not been discovered, the natives had prevented the killing of one of their own people.

However that might be, I knew that unless I could secure my freedom before the tub in the torture chamber should be filled by that cursed dripping, I would desire with all my heart that the Spaniard had plunged the knife into my unconscious body. I should have been on guard every moment, at least so long as my friend's life lay in my hands, I thought bitterly. But self-reproach gained nothing: I turned my attention again to my bonds.

But I made no further progress in the ensuing hour than I had made before. It was entirely dark now, and somewhere there began a faint *tap-tap-tap*, which took on the sound of dripping water—although I knew it was not. It tried to drive me mad. My wrists had swollen now. At first I could turn them slightly in the rings of rope which encircled them. Now they were chafed and bleeding and swollen, and I could not. At last, setting my teeth against the pain, I tried to pull one hand through the circle by main force, at any expense, even though the flesh should be stripped from that hand; but the effort proved useless. It hurt excruciatingly but the bones of the hand were too big to permit its passage. I had to give up at last, to admit that the thing I had to do was impossible. If only I could have reached the rope, anywhere, with two fingers only, I could have plucked it apart in time, fiber by fiber. But I could not. And so, giving up the effort I lay there in the darkness, trying to think of some miracle I might perform. But no inspiration came, and no miracle, and the hours passed.

I judged that it was near midnight when I heard the sound of slippers proceeding along the street. They stopped. There came a gentle knocking upon the door, startling me, for in all of my thoughts it had not occurred to me that anyone, except perhaps the Spaniard, would come to this house. It was not the Spaniard now, for he would not have knocked. The summons was repeated Well, I thought, whatever comes can not be as bad as what is; wherefore I called in Arabic for the visitor to enter.

I heard the door swung open, heard footsteps in the room, but the darkness was so complete that I could not even perceive the outline of the figure.

"Señor Francisco?" questioned my unseen visitor. He spoke in Spanish, but I knew from the guttural tones of his voice that he was a native, and his question suggested to me a plan of escape.

"Sidi Francisco is not here," I replied in Arabic. "If you have matches will you not make a light? My friend, Sidi Francisco and I were attacked. He was carried away and I was left here bound. I will be grateful if you will release me."

I heard a grunt of surprise, a fumbling, and then a match sputtered, illuminating the face and figure of a black bearded native, who was looking curiously at me. Then, gazing about the room, his eyes fell upon one of the candle lanterns we had left. He picked it up, lighted it, and approached the corner wherein I lay, to stare down at me.

"Hmph!" he grunted again. "They did their work well."

"Too well, Sidi," I replied. "These ropes are growing very painful. Will you not cut them?" He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and I began to wonder if my ruse would succeed.

"It is strange," he said. "I wonder who would attack the Spaniard." But I was ready for this question.

"I think, Sidi, that it was some friends of the Sultan. He cried out something to that effect when they seized him. And one said to me that what had happened to us would happen—" I hesitated a moment, then fairly well assured that any night visitor to the Spanish gun-runner would probably be a friend of the revolutionist who called himself Mulai Mohammed, I continued—"would happen to all friends of Mulai Mohammed."

THE native scowled. I realized that my fabrication had been fortunate. And my relief may have been imagined when he reached within his cloak, pulled a long curved knife from its sheath, and bending over, cut the ropes which held me. I sat up, chafing my wrists and arms, and made the surprising discovery that my automatic was still in its holster beneath my arm. Slowly I got to my feet, unsteadily, and I was thinking fast. The lies I had told this man had set me at liberty. I had in mind to tell other lies which might set at liberty Brandon Grey. The *tap-tap-tap* which I had heard I had finally identified as that of a hammer upon metal, and not far away. I suspected that the brass worker was working during the night as well as during the day to get some job finished on time, and I now had it in mind to get from him the file I needed and to inveigle this native into helping me get Brandon Grey out of the torture chamber.

Earlier in the day I would have needed no help, but now I knew that he would be so weakened from emersion in the water, to say nothing of the effect upon his nerves of the continual dripping, that I would need help to get him up to the hole in the wall on one side and down from it on the other. And with this in mind I spoke again to my unknown rescuer.

"I think, Sidi," I told him, "that I know where they have taken Señor Francisco, and if you will accompany me perhaps we can recover him. Will you do so?"

"Why not?" he said. "I desire to see him. Therefore let us go."

"But," I said, "I have one matter to attend to first. Wait here for me for a moment." I left the house and hurried toward the place whence came the tapping noises. There, sure enough, although the door of his shop was closed, I found the brass-smith working. He opened the door at my request and was very glad to exchange an old file for a Spanish peseta piece. In a moment I was back in Francisco's house and found the native standing as I had left him.

"Come, Sidi," I said then, picking up the bundle of rods and the hook I had made, "now we will go to see if we can find our friend, Francisco." At my request he lighted another lantern. Imperturbably he watched me go through the shuttered window into the passageway of the city wall, and silently he followed me. In due course we came to the transverse wall, beyond which I had left Brandon Grey. Swiftly, while the Moor watched with expressionless face, I jointed and tied together the cleaning rods until I had a pole sufficiently long. On the end I fastened the hook I had fashioned from the lantern handle. When this was completed I raised the pole carefully, got the hook up to the hole in the wall and over the piece of rope I knew to be there, and pulled. The rope ladder I had visioned came unrolling down.

"Hmph!" grunted the native. "Is it in there you expect to find Sidi Francisco?"

"Yes," I lied, "I think he is here." I gave no time for further embarrassing questions, but called to him to follow me, and hooking a lantern over my arm I ascended the ladder, reached the hole in the wall and crawled in. My lantern showed me that the ladder was hooked over a short iron pin set into the stonework and I was surprised and pleased indeed that it had not slipped off of this short pin when I had pulled it down.

"Are you coming?" I shouted down to the Moor, then peering over I saw him put his hands upon the ladder. Without waiting for him I slid through the hole and sat down, my legs hanging over the edge. As soon as the Moor came up we would pull up the ladder and use it to descend on the inside of the wall. In the meantime I called to Grey.

"Are you all right, old man?" I asked. "If you are, say yes—but don't talk."

"Righto," came back from him, but in a strained, weak tone.

The Moor should have been up by now. I turned to see what was the matter with him.

The ladder was no longer hanging over the hook. I leaned forward quickly and peered over, thinking that perhaps it had come unfastened, while the Moor was ascending.

Now by the light of the lantern sitting at his feet I saw the Moor holding the ladder in his hands, saw him throw it into a corner and then look up at me with a grin which seemed horrible.

"Why don't you come up?" I asked. "Did the ladder fall down?"

"No," he answered me. "I took it down—in order that you may have a pleasant visit with your friend Señor Francisco."

"But—but—" I could say no more.

The Moor then enlightened me.

"You will understand better perhaps," he said, "if I introduce myself to you, whose name I do not know. I trust you will have a pleasant night. My name is Belabbas."

Chapter VIII

STACKED ARMS

WELL, I set Brandon Grey, more dead than alive, at liberty at last. At liberty, that is so far as the deadly tub was concerned. At liberty I might say, to enjoy captivity with me. And I felt cheered thereby—mightily cheered. Together we could face what was to come. Two heads had not been better than one when I had unknowingly asked Belabbas to aid me; but I felt sure that now they would be.

I must admit that I felt cheap indeed at the way Belabbas had tricked me. Even the fact that I had tricked him first into releasing me from my bonds, when he had believed what I had said and had not known me, did not entirely offset, in my mind, the chagrin arising from the way he had fooled me when at last he did learn what I was up to. He had not known me; I had not known him—but he had been the first to learn. There was one thing at least for which Brandon Grey and I had to be thankful. Belabbas apparently had forgotten, in his undoubted surprise when I had led him to the hole in the wall, my short absence from the house when I went to the shop of the brass worker. As a consequence of this oversight, I had retained the file which I had procured.

Besides this, we had a light now, the lantern contained a fairly large candle which by careful usage would last a considerable time, or which, if we extinguished it now and then to conserve it, could be relighted with the matches which I had secured from the Señorita Valdez.

Brandon Grey was in sorry plight, and I worked feverishly to cut the chains which held him, not because of the height of the water, which was but little above his middle, but because of his physical condition as the result of being unable to move and of the icy cold water which had numbed and paralyzed him. But he was a strong man with a reserve of strength which came to his rescue as soon as I had dragged him from the tub, partially stripped him and given him a brisk rubbing. In a quarter of an hour, perhaps, he was able to walk about the chamber and something of the look of a live man had returned to him. Then he picked up the lantern and began to make a careful examination of the dungeon wherein we were.

The examination served to cheer us little. Two walls of the room were solid stone, as was the floor and apparently the ceiling. A third side was solid save for the hole through which we had entered. The fourth side bore the outline of a large doorway which had been filled in with cut stones cemented together. Seemingly it was as solid as the rest of the wall. Brandon Grey summed up the situation in a few words.

"Cut a hole through this old doorway with the file," he said, "or tear up our clothing and so make a rope which we may be able to cast over the iron peg in the hole. To cut through the wall means days of work; to toss a rope into that hole so that it will catch on the peg means inconceivable luck. Which shall we attempt?"

"Belabbas," I pointed out, "will probably be returning with his friends before long. He knows we have clothing, probably guesses that we would try to make a rope from it. Of course it is practically impossible to get the rope fastened in the hole: even an expert with a lariat, and the best sort of a rope, would find difficulty in casting a noose over a peg set within a two-foot-square hole a dozen feet above his head, having to make the cast at an angle of perhaps sixty degrees."

Grey nodded his head in agreement,

looked at the sealed up doorway, shook his head again doubtfully.

"We don't know how thick that wall is," he pointed out, "and we have only the one tool, the file. And, as you say, Belabbas will probably be returning."

Here I suddenly bethought myself of the automatic pistol in the holster under my arm. I drew it forth.

"This," I offered, "will hold Belabbas and his friends for a while, I think. They will have to come through the hole one at a time."

"I don't think they will try to enter," said Grey. "More probably they will just put a man on guard outside so that if we should manage to get a rope fastened it would not do us any good. His idea, I imagine, would be just to leave us here—forever."

"In that case," I said, "and I agree with you, it's up to us to begin cutting through the wall."

We selected a stone big enough, were it removed, to permit the passage of our bodies, but low enough down to make our labors at it most efficient, a stone waist high. A few jabs of the pointed end of the file, which fortunately for us was large and heavy, revealed that the mortar in which the stone had been set was nearly an inch thick. This fact was in our favor, as age and dampness had softened it and its thickness gave us room in which to work the file. Had the stone been set in with the usual quarter-inch of cement our task would have been almost, or entirely, impossible. But the walling up of the gate had apparently been done in haste, and much mortar used, to save time of squaring off the stones.

Once we had made a little impression upon the mortar, Grey extinguished the candle in the lantern and we worked in darkness. This was unpleasant. Darkness has a way of illuminating the images in one's mind, and the image which persisted in mine was of the picture in this stone chamber some days later in case the wall we were attacking was as thick as that through which we had passed. Because of the apparent haste in its construction we had a right, I felt, to hope that it was but one layer of stone. In that case we could break through it; but when we removed the stone on which we were working, would there be other thicknesses through which we would have no time to penetrate? And suddenly I felt a sickening sensation as the thought came to me that even if we did penetrate this wall, what would we find on the other side? Perhaps—probably, in fact—a dungeon similar to this one. But I kept this cheerless thought to myself, and in fact we talked not at all as we worked. When Brandon Grey's hands grew numb from prodding with the file I relieved him, and thus we continued through the hours.

What is there to say concerning these hours? What does a man think as he chips bits of mortar hour after hour with sure death at his back and only possible liberty ahead? It is true I thought now and then of Belabbas, of Mulai Mohammed, of the Spaniard and of the Señorita Valdez. But to tell the truth, they occupied a surprisingly small amount of my attention. No, in such a situation, when the efforts are being exerted and continued at a monotonous rate of physical action, the mind rides its own horse. And mine insisted upon ignoring the present situation and in carrying me back through the years to re-picture a thousand and one scenes of no importance whatsoever. I almost laughed aloud when I found myself thinking of the stupendous bustle that my grandmother used to wear.

We could not judge the passage of time—time for us had become only the lengthening crack between the stones. No light had shown in the hole in the wall, no sound had come to indicate that Belabbas or any of his men had returned. Only the sharp grating of the file point against the mortar and our loud breathing could be heard; these and the infernal drip, drip of water from the pipe above the tub. It might have been six hours we had worked, or it might have been sixteen, but at last we had removed all the mortar the file would reach on two sides and the top of the big stone. Then we thrust our fingers into the crevice we had created and strove to break the rock from the mortar beneath it.

It did not move. Despite our efforts it was solid as it had been before all our labor. Nothing remained save to continue our work upon the mortar which lay beneath it.

More hours passed and at length Grey laid down the file. I relighted the lantern and we again seized the stone, pressing downward upon it with all our weight. This time it toppled forward a little. And now we fell to working it from side to side, pulling it forward. It came, a hair's-breadth at a time it seemed, but it came. And at last it projected so far from the wall that we got our shoulders under it, lifted it and threw it clear. Thereafter

for some moments we stood there, both of us, staring in the hole. I was waiting for Grey to lift the lantern and reveal our fate. I suspect that he was waiting for me likewise. Suddenly he raised the light and thrust it into the hole we had made.

At the far end of the hole was a smooth wall of rock.

Or was it rock? Moving the lantern closer I thrust the file against the seeming rock and cried out in relief. The file penetrated it; it was only a coating of stucco which had loosened from the end of the stone we had removed. A half dozen pokes from the file and it fell away.

Through this hole I crawled, took the lantern from Grey and watched him wriggle through. Then I raised the lantern to reveal the room. We looked about. Both of us, I think, shouted in amazement.

THE candlelight showed that we had gained access to an armory. Against the walls crude wooden racks had been built which bore stands of arms. Long narrow boxes were stacked in the center of the room and a glance sufficed to show that they contained guns. A lantern squatted upon one pile of boxes, and several others hung from wires which had been fixed to the ceiling. This room, for some reason, was perfectly dry, dusty. Brandon Grey expressed my thoughts when he said, "The Spaniard's storehouse, or Mulai Mohammed's armory?"

But together with this question there had come into my mind another. Regardless of whose guns these were, it was manifestly necessary that there should be a method of ingress and egress to this arsenal. The house wherein I had found the Señorita Valdez connected with the city wall; it seemed almost certain that the chamber in the city wall wherein we now stood served as a back room for some house which abutted the city barrier. Whether this arsenal belonged to the Spaniard, Francisco, or to Belabbas, or to Mulai Mohammed—and so far as we were concerned they were all the same—it was certain that from it was an exit which would lead us into someone's domicile. Whose would it be?

"Let us," said Grey, "first find the way out of this place. I cannot see any door."

I gave a quick scrutiny to the walls. It was true, there seemed to be no doorway. This was strange, strange enough to set us both upon a careful inspection of the walls, particularly of that which we knew divided this room from the house to which it must be attached. But beyond any question whatsoever, that wall was solid stone. This being definitely established, we turned to the other walls. But as I have said, they were almost covered with racks holding rifles. Of course a rifle rack may be so built against a door that it will swing with it. But our most careful efforts failed to locate any such portal. A space in the center of the wall through which we had burrowed contained no racks, but to this wall, of course, there was no need of giving attention.

Brandon Grey and I looked at each other with some astonishment and a little amazement. I began to make a remark when a sound came to my ears, and I stopped. Grey heard it, too, stepped quickly over to the hole we had cut and poked his head into it. I joined him. Voices came to us, somewhat faintly, but still clearly enough so the words might be distinguished: talk in Arabic concerning what very shortly was going to happen to the two masquerading *askaris* in the torture chamber.

"Belabbas and his friends," Brandon Grey backed up a little and whispered.

That was obvious. They were returning to make sure that Brandon Grey and I were eliminated from opposition to their plot. Sounds were perceptible, scrapings upon the floor of the passageway and against the wall, which indicated that they had brought a wooden ladder. Very shortly they would have the rope ladder in place inside the chamber and would be descending. It was scarcely probable, I thought, that the light would be strong enough to reveal the absence of Grey from the tub or the absence of both of us from the chamber until they had reached the floor. But then it would require but an instant for them to perceive that the tub was empty, to find the hole in the wall. That they would be fully armed was a certainty. This thought reminded me of our own defense.

I had my automatic, but Brandon Grey's, I knew, had been taken from him. However, I chuckled inwardly at the thought that we had several hundred stands of guns at our backs.

"We had better get some rifles ready," I said to Grey, "because it looks to me as though there was going to be a fight. And how shall we manage it?"

It would have been a simple thing, of course, for us with the rifles to have pot-

ted Belabbas and his friends as they descended the ladder or after they were in the room, with but little chance of them injuring us in return. I was capable of the thought, but incapable of the execution of it. It would be rotten sportsmanship, and I knew Brandon Grey would feel the same way. The suggestion which he made was more acceptable.

"Once they are down into the room we can hold them there with a rifle, one of us, while the other tries to find a way out of this confounded armory. There must be a way." He reached over and took a rifle from one of the racks. "Did you see any ammunition?" he whispered to me sharply.

I had not, but I set about looking for it. At first I had expected easily to lay hand upon cartridges. Then I began to search in earnest, and finally faced the fact that so far as I could see there was no ammunition in the place.

"Anyhow, they won't know it," Grey grinned. "And here they come." He poked a rifle through the hole, let it rest upon the stone. "Now," he said, "go ahead and see if you can find an exit."

I started upon the renewed search.

"Stay where you are!" Brandon Grey's voice snapped out abruptly in Arabic.

I saw him smiling sweetly over the sights of his rifle. Putting my head alongside his I saw through the hole the figure of Belabbas and two other natives huddled in the corner at the foot of the rope ladder, staring with wide eyes and surprised mouths at the orifice from which the voice had sounded, and through which a gun covered them.

Suddenly it occurred to me that if I could but find the exit an excellent piece of strategy might be executed. I could gain the street, return to the house of the Señorita Valdez, then re-enter the city wall, and returning to the hole through which the Moors had climbed, pull up the rope ladder and take it away with me, leaving them to the same condition of captivity in which they thought they had left us. No doubt we could find some method of barricading the hole we had cut through the wall into the arsenal. But I could not find the confounded exit.

Quite unexpectedly, however, I learned where it was. The rough, low pine table in the middle of the floor was suddenly tipped over, a square opening was revealed, and through this opening appeared the head and shoulders of Francisco Valdez. Beneath him I saw, in that first startled glance, the faces of two Moors. It must have been that Valdez was as startled as I. We stared at each other while one might have counted five, perhaps. Then I reached for my gun, and called a warning to Brandon Grey. Quick as I was the Spaniard was quicker. His pistol spat flame and I felt a numbing pain in my right arm; saw that my hand dropped the pistol. I reached for it quickly with my left hand, only to have it leap from beneath my fingers as a bullet from the Spaniard's pistol struck it.

NOW confusion reigned. The Spaniard leaped into the room; Brandon Grey met him, using his rifle as a club. The Moors behind the Spaniard joined the fray. Brandon Grey's rifle had knocked the Spaniard's pistol from his hand and it had fallen through the trap door in the floor. Quickly Valdez replaced it with a knife. I managed to recover my own pistol only to find that it had been rendered useless by Valdez's bullet. So in imitation of Grey I seized a rifle and managed to lay out one of the attacking Moors. I now duelled with the other one, rifle butt against knife, and out of the corner of my eye saw Brandon Grey engaged in a similar struggle with the cursing Valdez. It was a rather even match: so long as we could wield the rifles it was difficult for our opponents to use their knives; but there was one disadvantage I did not, and neither, I judged, did Brandon Grey, dare to raise my rifle for a blow which would knock out my opponent; that would have given him an opportunity to get home with his knife. All I could do was to keep thudding at him, using my rifle much as a billiard player uses a cue. And then I saw the head and shoulders of Belabbas coming through the wall.

Very shortly, I realized, we would have five opponents against us.

As I shouted a warning to Grey the Moor whom I was opposing, having his back to the trap door, sidestepped to avoid faling into it as I pressed him back. Then, surprisingly, a thing happened which changed the situation. I saw the figure of the Spanish girl rise swiftly from the trap door, saw her hand and arm flick forward, saw the glitter of a long knife—and my opponent, screeching from a horrid cut in his leg, jumped forward, stumbled and fell. When I looked again the Spanish girl had disappeared. As quickly as I

could do so I jumped to my fallen foe and with a swing of my rifle gave him a tap on his head which laid him out. I hoped that I had not killed him, but spent little time considering the matter. The Spaniard, whom Brandon Grey was holding off, had little chance now, between the two guns. He saw me coming, used the fatal moment to glance at the silent form of his ally, and then fell beneath a blow from Grey.

Belabbas, seeing how things were going, pulled himself back into the hole, even as I rushed at him. Thereupon I seized Grey's arm and pulled him to the trap door and we leaped in. I had remembered seeing a bolt on the other side of the door, and now swinging it down I slid the bolt into the bolt hole. We found ourselves in a low passageway at the far end of which was an oblong of light, and silhouetted in this oblong was a girl's figure.

We wasted no time there. I had noted that there was a ring on the upper side of the trap door, although the table had at first concealed it, and in fact had scarcely bolted it before I heard fingers fumbling at it. Nor was the door very solid—I suspected that if Belabbas and his friends were to slide a rifle barrel through the ring and two or three of them pull upward on it they would tear the door loose from its fastenings. Hence it behooved us to get elsewhere in haste.

I explained this to Grey as we hurried along the passageway.

"Then," said Grey, "we had better barricade the door ahead of us if we can. At least we ought to be able to hold them for a while." Passing through the low doorway we found ourselves in a room somewhat similar to that room in the Spaniard's house where I had lain prisoner. Another room ahead of it, separated from it by a big archway, contained windows which I imagined opened onto the street. I looked at the Spanish girl after we had closed and bolted the door; found her disheveled, clothes torn, and a rope still upon one arm.

"They brought me here and tied me up, señor," she explained. "And I—I knew that you were also a captive. I could not help thinking about your poor friend in the water. Therefore I made every effort to escape in order that I might aid you or aid him. Both perhaps. But it was only after Francisco and the Moors had gone into the passageway and after I heard sounds of fighting that I was able to free myself."

We assured her that she had come to our aid in the nick of time, but she brushed aside the compliments we would have paid her.

"It is nothing," she averred. "Nothing to speak about. And now what shall you do?"

We told her then of our plan for barricading the door. That was a good idea, she thought, and helped us carry chests of drawers and other articles of furniture which we piled against the door so that it would have taken a great force indeed to break it open. In fact I was satisfied that there would be no exit for Belabbas and his friends in this direction. And that reminded me of my previous plan.

"Come," I said to the girl. "Come and show me the house of your cousin, Francisco."

Grey understood my intention; the girl did not need to, although I explained it to her later. She led us quickly out of the house which, as I suspected, opened onto a street, and down the street a short distance she paused before a door which she flung open for us.

Again she found and lighted lanterns for our use as I threw open the wooden shutters of the window through which I had already passed more than once. Swiftly we passed through the aperture, found ourselves in the passageway of the city wall, sped along it until we came to the wall of the torture chamber.

There, sure enough, was a wooden ladder standing under the hole.

Brandon Grey sprang ahead of me, mounted the ladder and thrust his hands forward.

"It's here," he cried, looking down at us, and began swiftly to haul up the rope ladder which hung suspended inside the room. Then, grinning, he came down to us again and between us we bore back to Francisco's house the rope ladder and the wooden one.

It seemed to me, and it seemed to my friend, that we had neatly captured Belabbas and his men, as well as the Spaniard and his native followers; that we had changed places with them most satisfactorily. I could not see, nor could Grey, that they had any more means of making an escape than we had had. Perhaps not so much, for luck had been with us in giving us only a thin wall to penetrate into the arsenal. Most anywhere else now, we should have been confronted by thicknesses of wall which would require weeks to dig through.

Yes, it seemed as though we had elim-

inated from the equation the two men who had thus far given us the most trouble, and that the path was clear now, for a while at least, to seek our real game—he who called himself Mulai Mohammed and claimed to be the rightful Sultan of Morocco.

Chapter IX

I FIND A SENTINEL

THERE was one thing to be done at once, however, and the señorita reminded us of it. That was to get her safely out of Arzila, to get her feet set, with those who would protect her, on the way to Tangier. What would happen to her if her cousin Francisco were to make his escape did not make pleasant thinking. I knew that if he did not know, he would at least suspect, and with a Spaniard, suspicion is usually as compelling a force as certainty. We must make use of the time while Francisco was a captive to get the girl to safety.

This at first seemed to be a simple matter, but on further consideration certain dangers became perceptible.

"We do not know," Brandon Grey pointed out, "the extent of this plot in Arzila, nor the number of men who may be involved. I think it would be extremely hazardous to attempt to send the señorita to Tangier at the present moment. It's quite true that wrapped in a native *haik* she might pass through the streets anywhere without being recognized—but that differs from making a fifty-mile journey in company with men whose curiosity would naturally be somewhat aroused. Idrees and some of his men are in town, and I could send them with the señorita, but I fancy that in the near future we are going to have use for them."

"But," I objected, "after what the Señorita Valdez has done for us we cannot let her remain here in danger."

"Quite true," agreed Grey. "But there is an alternative. We can let her remain here if she is not in danger. What I had in mind is this: there is a house on the other side of town—where Idrees is at present I suppose—which as you know, is at my service. If the señorita has no objections she could remain there until we get our business cleaned up and then she could proceed with us to Tangier. She would be in no danger in the house I speak of, because I will see to it that it is always guarded. But I am very much afraid of setting her feet upon the road to Tangier in company with anyone whom I do not know."

"I will do as the señor suggests," said the girl. "I am sure he will let no harm come to me."

"In that case, we had better travel," said Grey. "I want to get into some different clothes; both you and I, Dale, had better change our appearance merely as a matter of precaution. Now if the señorita will follow us, taking care to hold her *haik* up in front of her face, the distance is not long."

We set off across the town, and, just when the south gate came into view, we turned off the main road into a by-street and at Grey's summons were admitted into the courtyard of a dwelling house. Brandon Grey held a rapid conversation with Idrees, who had opened the door for us, arranging that the Spanish girl be taken in charge by old Fat'ma, the cook. Idrees led the girl away and Grey led into the house where came shortly Idrees bearing arms full of native clothing for our use.

The stain we had put on our faces was quickly removed by a preparation which Grey applied, and then after bathing we donned the apparel of the town Moor—the baggy trousers, fine white linen shirt, colored broadcloth vest, and over this the lightweight white *sulham* and heavyweight colored one. Fez and turban, white wool stockings and yellow slippers completed the outfit—except for the shoulder bag which took the place of pockets, and the automatics which were concealed by our robes. Scarcely was this change effected when Fat'ma came bringing an immense tray laden with food, which we ate with gusto. It had been a long time since we had eaten, but in the excitement we had noticed no hunger pains. Then a couple of whiskey-and-sodas and cigarettes while we lay at ease on floor cushions and discussed plans for the immediate future.

"The house of the fifth door from the Tangier gate," said Grey, "was, I believe, occupied by Mulai Mohammed as headquarters. Now, either he will go back there, which is doubtful; or he will find another house, which is probable. I do not think that he knows, or will be able to guess, what has become of Belabbas; but unquestionably Belabbas would have told him of having imprisoned me in the room with the tub. That is why I think he would not return to the place where he was

before. The problem, then, is for us to locate him."

"Don't you think," I asked, "that he was probably in the house of the fifth door when we entered and that he made his escape with the others into the city wall? If he did, where did he go?"

"That is still another question," agreed Grey. "Maybe he was there—maybe he wasn't. If he was, he went where Belabbas and the others went after they had chained me up. Which, of course, means that there is an exit from the city wall which we have not yet found."

"Wouldn't it," I suggested, "be a good idea for us to go back to the house of the fifth door, remove the barricade, and search for the exit which they must have known of?" Grey shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't like that city wall stuff," he said. "There are more passages than you would imagine. It is a mighty easy thing to get lost in the wall. We have had a couple of narrow squeaks, and I'm not looking for any more of them unless it's necessary. There is one fact which I don't believe has occurred to you. It's this: we entered the fifth house from the city gate. The gate was on our left. We turned to the right. Now it is obvious that although the passageway on the left led up to the gate, it did not pass it. It must come to an end there. Consequently either Mulai Mohammed and Belabbas went to one of the four houses between the city gate and the fifth door, or there must be a passageway which we did not see, which leads in the other direction, past the room where I was a prisoner, past the arsenal, and the good Lord only knows how much farther. If they have also one of the four houses next the city gate it will not be difficult to find it out; but if they have not, then there is the entire four or five miles of city wall to explore—an impossible feat."

"What is your suggestion?" I asked.

"First," Grey replied, "to ascertain who occupies the four houses between the city gate and the fifth door. If they are not open to suspicion—well, then I have a plan which we won't discuss at present. Particularly as I haven't got it worked out quite to my own satisfaction. The first thing to do is to find out about the four houses."

To the people we passed, as we made our way through the town, we appeared to be two town Moors. I knew that we wore our clothing properly, that our heelless slippers betrayed no awkwardness. One must learn to curl one's toes at precisely the right moment in the step. Our skins were now as white as those of the average native merchant, our beards were of sufficient growth to serve the conventions, and we conversed with each other in Arabic as we walked.

"We shall pose," Brandon Grey explained, "as two merchants from Tangier, who desire to open a carpet shop in Arzila, and who desire to rent a house in which to live. We desire, moreover, a house as near as possible to the Tangier gate, because the mosque of Mulai Idrees is near there, and because the nearer we live to the mosque the greater grace shall we acquire in the eyes of Saint Idrees. Hence there will be nothing strange in our inquiring about the four houses in which we are particularly interested."

"But who," I wondered aloud, "can tell us about these houses? Isn't there an *amin mustafed*, or some real estate official, who is in charge of the tax rolls?"

"That's the man we are going to see," said Grey. "He used to have a little office not far from the mosque, not far from the Tangier gate, and I believe he still is there."

WE FOUND the official, a fat, lazy Moor with heavy lidded eyes and pudgy hands, squatting in the cubicle which served him as an office, checking over tax lists. To him we made proper greeting and Grey explained our desires.

"As you know, Sidi," he added when this was done, "on this side of the street there are only shops, so that the only residences are on the other side. It is one of those that we should like to obtain if it is possible."

The *amin mustafed* leaned over ponderously, cast his eye down the street toward the houses we had indicated, although he must have known them as well as he knew his own hand. He leaned back again shaking his head slowly.

"The fifth house you could have rented a month ago," he said. "But even that is now occupied. There was some trouble there yesterday—but never mind; we were speaking of houses. The other four—there is no chance." His fat hand lifted a bulky roll of paper heavy as parchment, unrolled it.

"The first house is the property of his

excellency, Hadj Salem Terhouni," he droned, "the second house belongs to the merchant, Sidi Bushta, the third house is owned by his Excellency, the basha, and is leased for a term of years to Musa Zauda. The fourth house was sold during the current year to, and is occupied by, the grain merchant, Suliman, of Fez."

"They are all of them known to you, Sidi?" questioned Grey. The official looked at him quickly. "So, I mean, that you know they would not be willing to rent?" Grey hastened to add.

"All are known to me," pronounced the *amin mustafed* heavily. "They would not consider rental."

"In that case, Sidi, we beg to thank you for your information. We shall look about. Perhaps you will permit us to call again upon you tomorrow. In the meantime you might recall some other house which would be suitable for us."

"You may call, of course," said the *amin*, and we bade him adieu. I realized that Grey had brought the inquiry to an end very cleverly by failing to pass a few coins to the *amin* to purchase his continued interest in a house for us. But we had found out what we wanted to know. Except for the very slight chance that the *amin* was a follower of Mulai Mohammed, a colleague of Belabbas, and therefore had lied to us about the occupancy of the houses in question—a contingency which seemed extremely remote—we could rest assured that Mulai Mohammed was not utilizing any of these houses as his headquarters.

"Thus," observed Grey, "we can forget them. It now remains to perfect and carry out my other plan. Let's go somewhere and think it over."

We returned to the house we had left not long before, to Brandon Grey's Arzilan domicile. The sun had set and it was already beginning to grow dark. As we entered the house the fragrant smell of steaming *kesk'soo* came to me and shortly afterward, with the Señorita Valdez as a guest, we were disposing of an excellent meal prepared by the ancient Fat'ma. The talk did not hang upon the momentous events through which we had recently passed; Grey appeared not to want to discuss them, and neither did I. Once or twice the señorita asked questions, but Brandon Grey cleverly led her thoughts into other channels. She withdrew as soon as the meal was finished, and then my friend took up the business in hand.

"I am going to leave you for a while," he said. "I am going with Idrees to see a cousin of his, who may know something of value to us concerning Mulai Mohammed. I would take you with me, except that Idrees must go, and I do not think we should leave the house unguarded so long as the señorita is here."

"No one knows of her presence outside the household," I pointed out. But Brandon Grey shook his head.

"In this country, *amigo*, things are known where it is least to be expected they would be known. I do not know, nor does the señorita, how many people Francisco is doing business with. We think that we came to this house unnoticed. But we can't take a chance. Besides, how do we know how long the city wall is going to hold Francisco and Belabbas and the others?"

"You don't think there is any probability of them escaping, do you?"

"No," he agreed, "I don't think they will get out until we let them out. But they might. There were passages and trap doors and things of which we did not suspect the existence; there may be others. So you be a good chap and stand guard until I get back. I sha'n't be long, barring accidents."

"About how long?" I asked, dissatisfied, feeling that I should be with him.

"An hour, I should say," he answered. "But don't start worrying for two hours, and then don't worry."

That was easy for him to say; nevertheless when he had gone I pictured, unnecessarily perhaps, but vividly, Grey and Idrees encountering Belabbas and his men, or Francisco, or both. Grey had explained, at my request, that he and Idrees were going to a cousin's of the latter, who lived near the south gate.

"How," I asked, prompted by misgivings, "should I recognize the house if—if necessary?"

"Idrees says," Grey told him, "that it is the only house in Arzila which has a round window in the front of it. By window, of course, I mean an airhole up near the roof."

I SAT and smoked and read in the utterly quiet house until an hour had passed, contentedly enough. But the following hour, as it waned, grew more and more disturbing. I tried to laugh at myself for my fears, but made

a failure of it. How, I asked myself, could I look back over the events of the last two or three days without feeling that danger still lurked at our elbows? I knew Morocco well enough to be aware that a man, a foreigner, attending to his own open and aboveboard business could come and go where he would, day or night, without mishap; but I was also vividly aware of the fact that a man cannot mix himself in plots or intrigue without drawing danger as a magnet draws steel.

I knew the Moor and I knew the Spaniard. I knew that, having nothing to do with their affairs, no interest in them, I could mingle with either or both of them on most friendly terms, would no doubt find them agreeable casual companions. This would be true of almost every Moor, of almost every Spaniard. But I also knew that to run counter to their interests meant making unscrupulous enemies of them, as it would of their fellows.

Hence, had Brandon Grey and I been in Arzila for mere pleasure, I would have thought nothing of him going alone, even to wander through the streets at night, would unhesitatingly have gone myself. But now I felt that every native was a potential enemy. And, with Mulai Mohammed having his headquarters in Arzila, it stood to reason that he must have many followers in the town. And all of them were enemies of Brandon Grey and myself.

It occurred to me unpleasantly enough that if Belabbas were to be fortunate enough to make his escape from the wall where we had him penned, the morrow would see a chase of hare and hounds, in which we would be the hares. But we could not go and slaughter Belabbas and the others in cold blood, and Brandon Grey did not dare to call upon the local basha for soldiers to seize them and imprison them in the Arzila prison. In fact, he suspected that the basha himself was supporting Mulai Mohammed.

The last minutes of the second hour dragged themselves away on heavy feet. My friend had given permission for me to worry when this time had elapsed, and worry I did. And at last, after half of the third hour had passed, I flung my *sulham* over my shoulders, drew the hood of it over my head and went into the courtyard, thinking that perhaps the night air would calm my nerves. The courtyard adjoined the house and was surrounded by a wall seven or eight feet high. Along one side of this wall ran a back street. There were flowers and bushes and a few small trees in the courtyard, which was now more of a garden than court, as the gate in the wall had been boarded up. I slippered around for a few minutes in the darkness, then out of curiosity climbed upon a big packing case which I noticed lying by the wall, and looked over into the street beyond. As I did so I saw a dark figure move back against the wall across the road.

This gave me something to think about. I had made some noise in mounting the box, and no doubt the watcher had heard me. That the man was watching the house I had no doubt; watching or reconnoitering. I hesitated for a moment as to what to do; then drawing my pistol I climbed the wall, dropped to the road and ran toward the spot where I had seen the shadow disappear. He ran before I could reach him, paid no attention to my command to halt, ran only the more swiftly when I fired at him. He came to a side street, veered into it and disappeared into the darkness.

I climbed back over the wall with a good deal of effort and re-entered the house. I was determined now to go in search of Grey. At first, after seeing the man whom I had tried to kill, I had felt that Grey was right, that the house should not be left unprotected, but now, I reflected, the place would not be molested; anyone who had intended to try to enter or to attack would have been warned that the place was well guarded. I sought old Fat'ma in the kitchen. She had heard the shot but was not disturbed by it. The noise of gunfire was common because of the presence of a garrison of native troops. But I was also surprised to see, squatting in the corner an old whiskered man smoking a long stemmed keef pipe.

"I am going out," I told her, "and you are not to open the door to anyone except when you hear the voice of Sidi Grey or myself. Moreover—" I looked at the old man—"can your man here handle a gun?"

"This is my brother," she said. "Get up, you lazy fool, and listen to the gentleman."

The old man grunted, laid aside his pipe and rose.

"Can you handle a gun?" I asked him.

"Of course, Sidi, of course. Was I not a soldier for many years?" His present appearance was no affirmative proof of this; still I went into the other room, secured a rifle and gave it to him.

"You two will guard the Spanish señorita while I am gone."

"There is no need for a gun, Sidi," said the old man. "No one will disturb us. Nevertheless—" he set the gun in a corner—"nevertheless, if anyone does, assuredly I shall slay him."

Thus it came about that three hours after Brandon Grey had left me I was shuffling through the dark streets of Arzila toward the south gate in search of the house with the circular window.

Chapter X

THE SULTAN'S SEAL

THE African stars illuminated things faintly, so that I was able without difficulty to make my way across the town, and upon drawing near to the Fez gate discernible for quite a distance because of the lanterns of the night guards stationed there, I was able to locate the house of Idrees' cousin, the dwelling with the circular window, so-called, near the roof. It appeared as a disc of blackness against the white wall of the house. Beneath it was a door and upon this door I lost no time in knocking. There was no answer to my summons and I hammered again, more loudly. Still no answer, and there was that peculiar seemingly audible silence which pertains to houses empty of humans. Nevertheless, after a due interval, I rapped again, and no answer being forthcoming to the third summons, I turned away and was debating what to do, when three figures which I had not seen before approached the house. Not to be caught unaware, I half drew my pistol from the holster beneath my shoulder and waited. Probably the trio were only passing along the street, but I was not to be caught off guard. I was glad of this precaution, when one of them stepped toward me.

"Schoon h'naya?" Who is here? he queried. I was about to reply that I sought a certain man named somebody or other, when another voice spoke, that of Brandon Grey.

"I am glad you're here," he said. "I was going back to the house now to reassure you. I suppose you worried."

The man whom I took to be Idrees' cousin was now engaged in fitting a huge iron key into the keyhole of the door. It swung open and he begged us to enter, then urged us to make ourselves comfortable upon the floor cushions and suggested coffee, an idea with which I was in full accord. This left Grey and me alone while the two natives made a fire and brewed coffee in the kitchen. And after we had lighted cigarettes, I looked at Grey and saw the gleam of adventurous reminiscence in his eye. "Well, shoot," I said. "What have you been up to?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only—I have seen Mulai Mohammed and become one of his followers."

"You have what? Are you joking?"

"No," he affirmed. "It's the truth. You see, when Idrees and I got here to the house of his cousin, his cousin told about having noticed quite a number of strangers coming and going from a house just off the market-place. Observant sort of chap, he seems to be. At any rate it struck him as queer that these fellows were all strangers. He claims to know everybody in Arzila and most of the country round about. It looked to me as though this were worth looking into and consequently we took a walk up to the market-place, the three of us.

"There I left Idrees and his cousin and sat myself down upon the matting of a coffee house from where I could see those who entered and left the place Idrees' cousin had indicated. I figured that pretty soon some one of them would want some coffee—you know the café here is like the English pub or the American saloon—and I guessed right. I had not been sitting there long when a fellow came out, shuffled over to the café, squatted down and ordered coffee. I sized him up as a country Moor, not very intelligent, and it was not difficult to get into conversation with him. No use going into that. *You* know how you would go about it.

"The upshot of it was that I convinced him that I was a *kaid* just arrived in Arzila for the purpose of offering the support of myself and the men of my village to the noble Mulai Mohammed. The fool did not even question me, merely assured me that Mulai Mohammed was the rightful Sultan, and that no doubt he would shortly be on the throne. Then I had him, but just for luck I tried out on him the charm which the Black Magician gave us in Tangier—just showed it to him in the palm of my hand, very secretly.

"'*Allah!*' he exclaimed, '*Allah kerim!* It is the mark of the true Sultan!' So you were right in your guess, you see, that the birthmark which Mulai Mohammed

sports is the shape, roughly, of a five-fingered hand. This made me solid with him and—oh yes, I paid for more coffee for him—and then I became very friendly.

"I told him that although I had been told where to find Mulai Mohammed, I had gone to the fifth house from the Tangier gate but no one was there. Something, I suspected, had caused him to move his headquarters. Yes, the fellow said, something had happened, he did not know just what. But he could now be found at a house across the street.

"'I am going back there myself soon,' he said. 'You can go with me if you wish.'

"Naturally I wished, so he led me across the street, gave a couple of raps thrice repeated upon the door. We were admitted.

Brandon Grey stopped, and I could not help exclaiming at his luck.

"And you really saw Mulai Mohammed—or the man who claims to be he!"

"I actually did," Grey answered, grinning. "Sure enough. This bird from the country—who, by the way, was going to be basha of El K'sar, he told me, when Mulai Mohammed became Sultan—this bird took me into the Presence. Mulai Mohammed was sitting in an arm chair, while a dozen natives sat around him in a semicircle, cross-legged upon the floor.

"'Another follower for you, Sidna,' my countryman said loudly as we entered. Yes, he gave the impostor the royal title of Sidna. 'A *kaid* who comes to offer himself and his village.'

"The pretender was masked. His face was covered, from the edge of his turban to his chin, with a crimson cloth in which were two eyeholes.

"'It is well,' said Mulai Mohammed. Assuredly Allah will smile upon those who support justice. Verily I am the rightful sultan, in proof of which, behold the sacred mark.' With that—I had a hard time to keep a straight face, old man, it was almost like initiation into a lodge—with that he stripped away the clothing from his left breast and revealed a red birthmark shaped like a human hand."

WELL, I did the necessary. I prostrated myself and bumped the floor with my forehead and invited Allah to smile upon this worthy descendant of the Prophet and our rightful Sultan. Personally I think that Allah was not only smiling but laughing as well.

But to get on with the story. We apparently had entered in the middle of a discussion or a giving of orders, for now Mulai Mohammed continued the giving of them.

"I'll cut it short: at four o'clock tomorrom morning—yes, that's right, it isn't midnight yet—at four o'clock tomorrow morning all of his followers are to gather at the house and in the market-place, thence to launch an attack upon the garrison. It's the idea of Mulai Mohammed first to seize the garrison with its arms and ammunition—and I take it that some of the soldiers themselves have been seduced to his cause—and then to seize the town, in the belief that most of the townspeople will then rally to him. They might, at that. Because one of the birds I saw sitting at Mulai Mohammed's feet was our well known basha. And that's that."

"So," I said, "the revolution breaks at four A. M."

"According to Mulai Mohammed it will," said Grey. "But according to Brandon Grey it won't. Not if I can help it."

"But how the deuce can you?" I demanded. "You and I and Idrees and his cousin can't very well fight the whole town of Arzila, including the basha and the garrison."

"No," said Grey, "that's true. But you have no doubt heard the local proverb which says that little by little the camel goes into the stewpan. Very shortly we are going to begin to make stew."

"I await orders then," I told him. "And by the way. Wasn't there any curiosity about the missing Belabbas?"

"Mulai Mohammed mentioned him, and I judge from what he said that Belabbas had been intending to leave Arzila on some mission or other on the very day we locked him up, so they are not worrying about him."

"Well," I asked him then, "what's your program? I am perfectly at your service to carve the camel."

"The first thing we are going to do," answered Grey, "is to make you basha of Arzila."

When Grey told me that I thought he was joking; then seeing that he wasn't, wondered whether he had gone slightly insane. The idea was bizarre. But he was perfectly in earnest, and very shortly we set forth upon the first of our missions.

"The basha," he explained as we went along, "left the meeting for some purpose which I did not discover. But he was to report back to Mulai Mohammed within

an hour or two. His business, of course, was concerned with the arrangements for the intended seizure of the town in the morning. He went to his own residence, and that is where we are going."

The basha's house, I found when we reached it, was not a very pretentious place, but enough so to serve as the abode of the basha of a small town like Arzila. There was a big and fancy doorway in the front of the place, which I knew must enter into the garden in which the house was set. This gate was unlighted and, so far as we could determine, unguarded. The narrow street which approached it came to an end at a broad cross street which ran past the residence, and in this dark canyon like passageway we waited.

"I don't think," whispered Grey, "that he has left his house yet to return to Mulai Mohammed, but we will catch him either coming or going."

We had not long to wait. The gate creaked as it swung back and was drawn to again. A portly figure hastened toward us across the street. Apparently the basha was keeping this business a secret; at least he was not running around the town this night with a bunch of guards. It would have been better for him if he had been. As it was he walked into our arms, and before he could do more than grunt in surprise, Brandon Grey had seized him and I had wrapped the hood of his *sulham* around his face and neck, choking off any noise. I heard a tinkle of metal, a click, and saw that Grey had handcuffed the basha's hands behind him. And now my friend addressed the man in no uncertain terms.

"That which you feel poking you in the ribs, Sidi Traitor," he said, in Arabic, "is a pistol of large caliber which will make a most unsightly hole. You desire to know who I am, of course. I shall tell you. I am the man authorized by our Sultan, Mulai Abd-el-Aziz, to execute without trial any man whom I suspect of rebellion, and more specifically, any man whom I suspect to be a follower of one who calls himself Mulai Mohammed. I not only suspect you; I know you are guilty. Your life is in my hands: you may buy it for a price."

"I—I am no follower of Mulai Mohammed," the man gasped the words, as I loosened the throttling cloth a little.

"You lie," Grey told him bluntly. "I have just come from a meeting where I saw you at the feet of Mulai Mohammed, where I heard you accept instructions from him. You were returning to him now." I felt the big figure grow limp.

"What—what is your price, Sidi?" he asked.

"You do not wish to die then—for your Sultan Mulai Mohammed?"

"No, Sidi," quavered the man.

"In that case," rasped Grey, "you will lead us into your house, into your office, where we will discuss the price of your life. Lead on then, but do not forget that at the first sign of treachery a bullet will tear your heart to pieces."

THE big gate swung open again under the hand of the basha, closed under mine. I bolted it behind us. The basha led us through a dark garden to a little side door of the house. We entered that and found ourselves in a large room fitted up as an office in the native style. The basha obeyed Grey's motion and seated himself upon the cushions. Then Grey examined the doors and locked them. Pulled aside every hanging with which the walls were covered to make sure that there were no hidden doors through which we might be surprised. There were no windows to bother us. Two huge candles in floor candlesticks lighted the room, but there were half a dozen others standing around and these Grey also lighted.

At his suggestion I picked up a round table perhaps a yard in diameter, but not more than eight inches high, on which were paper, bamboo pens, ink and a dish of sand for blotting purposes, and set it down within the basha's reach. While I was doing this Grey searched the Moor, relieving him of the long curved knife called *kumiah*, which almost every native carries; relieving him also of a small caliber pistol. Then he unlocked the handcuff from the basha's left wrist, but snapped it around the man's left ankle. The position this caused did not seem comfortable, but it fairly well precluded any rash actions on the part of the native official.

These things being attended to, Grey stood in front of the basha, staring down at him coldly, and stated his desires.

"Have you a khalifa?" he asked. A khalifa is a vice-basha.

"No, Sidi, I have not, at the moment," replied the Moor.

"Strange," commented Grey, "but I suppose you were waiting to see who would pay the largest amount for the job. It is

well, however. In that case there will be no conflict of authority." Then my friend squatted cross-legged before the little table, reflectively lighted a cigarette and took several deep draughts of smoke, then began to write.

I watched him wonderingly. Writing Arabic swiftly is a rare accomplishment for a foreigner. But Grey's hand moved swiftly from right to left across the page and in a surprisingly short time he had written half a dozen lines. Then he made a tangle of lines which I knew to be a signature, although I could not read it, and finally he fished around in his bosom, drew out a thin chain at the end of which dangled a metallic object. This came apart in his hands and I saw that it was a rubber stamp. He impressed it above the signature.

"Do you know—" he held out the paper for the inspection of the basha—"that seal?"

The Moor's eyes bulged and he made an instinctive bow of reverence.

"That," he said, "is the seal of our Lord and Master, Sultan Mulai Abd-el-Aziz, upon whom be peace!"

"I thought you would recognize it," said Grey dryly. "And this document upon which I have just placed the seal, appoints in the name of the sultan, a new basha of Arzila. I present him." He looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes. "Sidi Alarbi ben Hassan," he said, extending me the paper, "here is your commission as basha of our city."

I was amazed, too, at the native name he had bestowed upon me, but at the same time I perceived that this thing was serious and in order. And I also perceived that my friend Brandon Grey had a standing with the Sultan of Morocco which few men have ever possessed. Possession of a duplicate of the Sultan's seal gave him the power of an autocrat. And, while it was not a power that could be used too freely, too openly, he possessed the power of inflicting death at his pleasure; the seal was full proof of that.

"And now," commanded Grey, to the basha whom I had superceded, "write you a message to the captain of the garrison, informing him that you have been abruptly summoned to Fez by the Sultan, and that you have been relieved by your successor, who bears appointment from His Majesty; also that the bearer of your message will exhibit this appointment in proof of his identity."

The Moor obeyed, writing industriously, for a few minutes, and then passing the paper over for Brandon Grey's inspection. It was satisfactory, it appeared, and Grey folded it and passed it to me.

"And now," he addressed the Moor again, "one more message. I will tell you what to write. Write to the Sidna Mohammed ben el-Kewak—which I believe is the full name claimed by your Mulai Mohammed—write thus:

While engaged upon a certain matter in accordance with the instructions of Your Majesty, I had the misfortune to fall and break my leg, as the result of which it is impossible for me to return to you this night to inform you of what I have done. I am sending you this by the captain of my guards, to act as your escort, and beg that in view of the importance of the matters I had in hand on your behalf, you will pay me the great honor of coming to me so that I may explain to you what arrangements I have made.

Once while he was writing this the pen of the basha stopped. He looked up with grim face into the still grimmer face of Brandon Grey—then went on with his writing.

"Treason to Mulai Mohammed," he muttered.

"Loyalty to Mulai Abd-el-Aziz," countered Brandon Grey. "Write."

And when the message was finished and sanded and folded in the peculiar manner of Moroccan correspondence, Grey unfastened the handcuff from the basha's ankle, then turned and unlocked the door.

"Rise now and summon the captain of your guards. Bid him deliver this message with all speed to Mulai Mohammed and to escort him hither. But do not forget the pistol which will watch you from beneath my *sulham*."

With that Grey squatted down upon the cushions near the door, so that his back was almost toward it, while he faced the basha. The basha crossed the room to a cord which hung from the wall, pulled it. In the distance a bell tinkled. Presently there came a sound of footsteps, the door was thrown open and a tall, dark native stood there in the uniform which indicated that he was captain of the household guards. For a moment, I thought, the basha hesitated. I saw a little motion beneath the folds of the *sulham* which lay across Grey's lap, and perhaps the basha saw it also; because, drawing a deep breath he handed the message to the captain.

"Carry this to the house where dwells the Sidna, Mulai Mohammed," he ordered, "and escort him back to us if it is his pleasure to come."

The captain saluted and withdrew closing the door. Grey rose swiftly and slid the bolt into place again; and then we sat in silence and waited for the coming of the man who claimed the Moorish throne.

Chapter XI

BEHIND THE MASK

WHEN at last we heard the awaited tapping at the door, it was Grey who slid the bolt and permitted it to swing open. In accordance with his suggestion I had taken up a position upon the cushions beside the basha—in case of contingencies. I did not have the slightest idea, nor do I think that he did, that the basha would make any false moves, but we did not intend to give him a chance.

We rose, of course, as the man called Mulai Mohammed entered.

"Dismiss the captain," I muttered to the basha, and at a word from him the captain of the guards closed the door and went away. Then Brandon Grey again slid the bolt, fastening the door.

At that sound the masked man who stood before us turned quickly, only to recoil from the muzzle of the pistol Grey had unholstered.

Watching this tableau I noted that the pretender to the Moorish throne was a man apparently of Grey's own build: the same height and breadth of shoulder, but if one could judge by his clothing, somewhat heavier set.

For what seemed to me minutes, the mask stared at the pistol in my friend's hand, then raised to search his face. I thought that the man must be shaken with surprise, overcome by his apparent betrayal at the hands of the basha. But I was to learn that, surprised and angered as he undoubtedly was, he had been doing some swift thinking in that brief interval.

With admirable nerve he proceeded to turn his back squarely to the gun in Grey's hand and to stride, without a word, toward the basha.

Obviously this reaction puzzled Grey as it did me, but the explanation came with lightning-like quickness: the half dozen paces across the room had given him time to thrust his hand inside his *sulham;* now he swung about and leaped upon Grey, who was close behind him. It was a desperately brave action. He could not know, as I did, that Grey did not dare to fire because a shot would bring the whole household running. And if Grey had been willing to shoot, Mulai Mohammed would have met quick death. As it was, I saw Grey parry the upward stroke of the terrible curved *kumiah* with a downward sweep of the pistol, I saw him toss his gun onto the cushion behind me, and as a continuation of the same motion, seize the wrist which held the knife. I took two steps forward to his assistance. He saw the action, shook his head.

"I can handle him," he said. "You watch the basha."

I had known that Grey was strong, but I could see that the big native was no weakling. Nevertheless under Grey's grip the hand which held the knife turned slowly against its will, while Grey's other hand and arm was locked around his antagonist. Slowly the wrist turned, the tendons stood out like small ropes, and at last the knife clinked upon the floor and slid toward me. I picked it up and thrust it into my belt. Grey would not want it, would not need it.

For man to man the Moor offers but poor resistance. The art of boxing is almost unknown to them, although they do know something of jiu-jitsu. and I knew that Grey was an expert with the gloves. I had scarcely time to think of this before I saw him release his hold upon the Moor's arm, feint with his left, and as the Moor instinctively guarded his masked face, gave an uppercut to his jaw. The pretender to the Moorish throne dropped as though he had been pole-axed.

"Allah kerim!" I heard the basha grunt. As for me. I think I applauded, but I am not sure.

"And now," said Grey grimly, "let's see the face of this gentleman with the political aspirations."

Mulai Mohammed lay stretched upon his back, and bending over, Grey tore from his face the silken mask.

It was a face of no distinction. Its complexion was dark enough to intimate the presence of mixed blood, and it was flecked with white where smallpox had left its scars. A close-cut and somewhat sparse black stubble ran over cheeks and chin and upper lip. The lips were coarse and heavy, drawn back now to show a few yellow teeth and above them a large nose had negroid characteristics. There was

good reason, I thought, as I looked at this face, for him to keep it masked. The mother and father from whom he pretended to have sprung, Mulai el-Hassan and his Sultana, were white.

Grey turned from a study of the face to look at the basha with a quizzical smile.

"You have seen this face before, Sidi." It was a statement rather than a question.

The basha nodded.

"You, of course, did not believe that he was the son of Mulai el-Hassan," continued Grey. The face of the basha, despite his predicament, grinned faintly.

"It was necessary that he should be," he answered.

"Do you know who he is—really?" questioned Grey. The basha shook his head.

"Nor care," he said.

"Nevertheless, I shall tell you," informed Grey. "This man is a native of Algeria, not of Morocco. Two years ago he was condemned in Algeria for murder—or for three murders, to be explicit—and sentenced to death. He managed to escape into the mountains, and came across them into Morocco. A year ago. His name is Bu-Hamara, and— What's that!"

The basha had made a peculiar sound. I had been looking, as had Grey, at the Algerian. Now we both looked at the basha, who was purple faced, and bulging eyed.

"You say," he gasped, "you say—that is Bu-Hamara?"

"Beyond a doubt," Grey assured him. "I have a photograph to prove it. Why?"

The basha came toward us, staring at the prostrate Algerian, then before we could guess his intention threw himself upon him in a frenzy of rage. Lacking the use of his hands he bit at the exposed neck like a beast of prey. We pulled him away as soon as we had recovered our momentary surprise. Then upon his knees at our feet he begged for gun or knife, or even that his hands be unshackled, that he might kill this man whom he had plotted to make sultan.

"If he is as you say, he is the dog that killed my father a year ago in Fez. Let me avenge my father. Let me kill the dog."

"No," Grey denied him, "even though it is indeed as you say. This man a year ago killed Hadj Malek Abderaman of Fez. Was he indeed your father?"

"*Aiwa,* yes, Sidi. Hadj Malek. Yes. Will you not permit me to kill this man?" But again Grey denied him, drew him to his feet and led him back to his cushion where, with head bowed to his knees, he sat and groaned. I could not blame him. It was a queer and malicious trick of fate that he should have turned traitor to the Sultan, should have fallen into the hands of Brandon Grey, probably would lose his bashalik and perhaps be imprisoned by the Sultan in the dungeons of Fez, all for the man who had killed his father.

It was unfortunate, but we had no time to waste upon the basha. It occurred to me that he might be of use to us now, but a moment's thought sufficed to reject this suggestion: even though the Moor might revenge upon his father's slayer, he would also acutely desire his own freedom, escape from well deserved punishment. Wherefore we could not rely upon him in any way.

Well, I was basha of Arzila, a truly incredible fact and I wondered what Grey had planned for me to do in that capacity.

I was soon to learn. We made short work of tying up the pretender and of making assurance doubly sure by using another pair of handcuffs which Grey produced, to shackle his wrist to an ankle. I felt that we did not consider his comfort very much, but it seemed to me we had made sure that he would not get loose. This being done we chucked him into a corner and withdrew into an alcove, out of earshot of the others, for a consultation. And the upshot of this conversation was that a quarter of an hour later I had learned the part I was to play, and had left the basha's residence to make various preparations, and to ascertain if all was as it should be at Grey's house. Grey elected to remain with his natives, assuring me that he intended to snatch a couple of hours' sleep and advised me to do the same. But as I had to be on foot again an hour before the meeting scheduled for four o'clock in the morning, I had little time for that.

ARMED with my document of appointment I sought the small military garrison and more particularly, its captain. My authority was supreme in Arzila, except for Brandon Grey—and except for that situation which modifies all authority, even the highest, namely, willingness on the part of one's subjects to obey or force enough to make them obey. Discontent was rife in Morocco, principally as the result of the machina-

tions of European powers. Thus the time was propitious for the arising of pretenders and other disturbers of the nation's peace, and disloyalty to His Majesty Abd-el-Aziz was to be encountered in many quarters where change of Sultans might react to the gain of the individual.

I knew from Brandon Grey that there were traitors among the little force of seventy-five or a hundred soldiers in the Arzila garrison. That some of them were known to be looking with favor upon the claims of the pretender, Mulai Mohammed. The former captain of this garrison had been involved in this movement, Grey had told me, but either by accident or intention, a rifle had gone off in his vicinity with results fatal to him. Grey understood the new captain to be one Kaid Attar, and had little confidence in his loyalty. But loyal or disloyal the document I carried should serve to bring the captain to order—particularly as I had been authorized by Grey to tender him, for his support in this matter, not only a better position, but certain English banknotes which I carried. Money talks a universal language.

I came eventually to the garrison gate, was carelessly halted by a slovenly and sleepy guard, who shook his head when I demanded admittance to the captain, stating that the chief was asleep. It would have been useless to have made any explanations as to my identity to this stupid fellow, but I knew of the astonishing fear they have of documents with official seals; and with good reason, because there are extremely few of them who can read, but many who know by sad experience that an officially sealed paper often carries grief. Letters from high officials are therefore met with great reverence, in many cases amounting to kowtowing, or prostration as though the letter were the person of the writer himself.

In the light of the lantern hanging on the gate I showed the guard the document I carried—pointed to the official seal of the Sultan. The fellow came out of his sleepiness most abruptly. And after paying due reverence to the symbol of the lord and master of the country, made haste to unlock the gate and to lead me through the garrison straight to the one individual domicile, the house of the captain. There another sleepy sentry halted us, staring stupidly at me.

"This excellency," said the guard from the gate, "bears a letter from the Sidna, Mulai Abd-el-Aziz. Present arms and inform his excellency the captain."

The second guard came to life abruptly as the first had done. Letters from the Sultan are usually received in a city only to the accompaniment of the thunder of twenty-one guns from the local battery.

But before the guard had applied his knuckles to the portal of the captain's house, the door swung open and a man stood framed in the doorway, his face illumined by the lanterns hanging on either side of him.

"What is this?" he demanded. "What do you say concerning a letter from His Majesty?"

The guards looked at me and I looked at the captain. I stepped forward quickly and spoke.

"Hadj Wazzani!" I exclaimed, calling him by name. "So *you* are captain of the garrison! Let us enter your house then, and I will explain the business." I was relieved, for this was not the unknown Kaid Attar, but one whom I had met and known fairly well in Tangier. A man I liked and who I believed was loyal to the Sultan.

My words startled him. He leaned forward to peer into my face, and I took advantage of this to whisper my name. At that his face cleared, he drew me into the house and closed the door.

"And so," he said, after I had explained the situation and my desires, "and so this boil comes to a head shortly, eh? Well, high time! High time! I was planning, I may tell you, to have a few private executions here in the garrison in the near future. Yes, I have known that things were stirring in Arzila, but I arrived only a few days since and one cannot be too hasty in handling such a situation, especially as the basha—" he hesitated.

"Particularly as the basha was mixed up in it," I completed for him. "Well, the basha is out now."

"That is well," he commented. "Nevertheless, the basha I believe was really forced into his position. He is greatly in debt, and his debtors were supporting Mulai Mohammed, notably one called Belabbas."

"Yes," I said, "and Belabbas must be placed where he can support no other pretenders."

Hadj Wazzani agreed with me heartily, but I did not tell him then of where I believed Belabbas to be at the moment, an omission which I was later to regret.

Time was passing swiftly and there were other matters needing my attention.

"You can, then," I asked, "pick out two score honest fellows of your garrison upon whom you can depend?"

"Assuredly, my friend, assuredly," he said. "In fact practically all that I have done in the few days I have been at this post is to discover what kind of an army —" he laughed at the word—"I have."

"And you are acquainted with the man who owns the coffee house across the street from the place where the meeting is to be held?"

"I know him well," the captain assured me. "We come from the same town, and he is loyal." I rose.

"Then at four o'clock you will have arranged to be concealed with your men in the coffee house awaiting the signal from me, which will be two pistol shots."

"It is already arranged, Sidi. Have no fear on that score. There is a rear entrance to the coffee house on a back street, through which I can send my men without being seen, a few at a time. I will begin the business at once."

And then I had the pleasure of using, as reward, that which I had thought to use as a weapon.

"I am authorized to tell you," I said, "in the name of His Majesty, that a better post will be yours as the result of your work tonight." But I did not mention the banknotes I carried. Hadj Wazzani was not that kind of a man.

Thereupon I went away from the garrison and started for Brandon Grey's house where I had left the señorita. The street I followed passed very near the house where we had barricaded the door against the egress of Francisco and Belabbas.

Time pressed, I knew; it had been two o'clock when I had started for the captain's house. It must now be three or later. Nevertheless the impulse seized me to take a look at the barricade. Then I felt that the impulse was silly, caused by my curiosity and started on my way again. But it would require only five minutes and the impulse was there, so I turned, retraced my steps and covered the short distance down a side street to where the house was.

I was startled, when I reached it, to see that the door was open. Startled and put on my guard, I listened carefully, for any sound which might indicate people within, heard none, and struck a match. There was no one in the room. I advanced into the passageway. The match burned out and I struck another. Its yellow gleam showed me that the barricade had been removed, that the door into the city wall was ajar!

VERY quickly I made my exit from that house. And, outside, I drew my pistol and held it ready. Belabbas and the others might now be at liberty, or, so far as I knew, the man who had moved the barricade might just have finished doing it and be still within the wall himself. It occurred to me to re-enter the house and replace the barricade, but I had to reject the plan at once. I had not the time for this labor, which, after all would be useless in case the escape had already been made, as seemed probable. Moreover, I could not afford to risk being attacked and overpowered by Belabbas or the Spaniard, or both, leaving Brandon Grey unaided and the captain of the garrison without anyone to give him the signal as arranged. My first duty, it seemed, was to protect myself in order that Grey's plans might be carried out. Therefore I went swiftly away from that place of danger.

I had not gone far, however, when I recalled the man whom I had seen watching the house, at whom I had fired unsuccessfully. Had that man been Belabbas or the Spaniard? As Grey had said, we could not tell, in such a place as this, who might know or suspect our actions. Was the man I had tried to kill one of our enemies reconnoitering the house previous to an attack in force? If Belabbas or the Spaniard were at liberty, it was beyond me to guess what they would do. We had sent Idrees and his cousin to guard the house, it was true, but it was quite on the cards that Belabbas could take with him enough force to overcome all the resistance they could put up.

It was, therefore, with hurried and perturbed feet that I hastened toward the house of Brandon Grey. As I swung around a corner, pistol in hand, into the street running by the house, I heard sounds. Sounds which speedily resolved themselves into the noise of combat. I approached and saw figures struggling in the darkness. Then a pistol shot was fired and another, and another.

Even though my principal duty might be to Brandon Grey and his plans, I could not let Idrees and his cousin wage unequal warfare against an undetermined number of men, who, I felt certain, included Belabbas and the Spaniard. That they were

fighting furiously was evident.

"Idrees! Idrees!" I shouted as loudly as I could and plunged across the street toward the twisting shadows.

"Idrees!" I called again. I could not shoot, not knowing friend from foe.

"Here, Sidi," said a voice, as a crouching figure approached and rose.

"Call your cousin," I commanded, "to come here to us."

"He is wounded, lying beside the wall," panted Idrees. "There were five. One I killed."

And then, the coast being clear, I began shooting. A black figure plunged toward me and I let him have it, bringing him to a heap at my feet. The others followed. Idrees swung a rifle as a club and I heard its impact upon a head. And then my automatic clicked, failed to fire, was exhausted of ammunition. I did not need it, however, for now our two opponents who were able to do so, turned and fled into the darkness.

I fished in my pocket for matches, failed to find them and was about to ask Idrees for some when I heard shouts from within the house, the door swung open and, lantern in one hand, rifle in the other, Fat'ma's ancient brother stood in the doorway waggling his beard and demanding what in the name of Mulai Idrees people thought they were doing, shooting in the streets and keeping honest folk awake. He baa-ed there like a nanny goat until I took the lantern from his hand and with Idrees turned to see what the light would show.

Almost at the gateway of the house lay Idrees' cousin.

"It is only a bullet through the shoulder, Sidi. Nothing serious," he greeted us.

We lifted him to his feet, found that he could stand, and took him to the gate, where the old man stood, and let him rest there; then returned to see what of the foes had fallen. The first we came upon was a native unknown to either Idrees or myself, a vicious looking fellow, and very dead.

At a little distance lay another. I lowered the lantern and saw that it was Francisco, the Spaniard, and a purple hole in his forehead indicated that he would run no more guns. I guess I hoped that the third man would be Belabbas. He was groaning and groaned worse when we turned him over to see who he might be. It was not Belabbas, and at first I thought I did not know who it was. Then remembrance came. This was the man, Sidi Achmed Lahya, who had sat across the table from me at Brandon Grey's home the night I rode to El-Menar in the attempt to capture Belabbas.

Now I saw, in a flash, why Grey later had asked me what I thought of him; and I saw, too, how the Black Magician had acquired his eerie knowledge of our plans. Apparently Brandon Grey, doubting this man, had let fall in his hearing something which would lead him eventually to reveal himself, and without any particular harm to Grey's own plans. Even as I was thinking this, the fellow opened his eyes, stared at me.

"How do you do, Sidi Dale," he said, and with a convulsion, died.

We carried the bodies into the courtyard and closed the door and then Idrees set about attending to the injuries of his cousin. My thought now was to get word to Brandon Grey, to warn him that Belabbas was at liberty. No telling what the man might do—Grey, in going to Mulai Mohammed's house at four o'clock might walk into a fatal trap. Was there yet time to go to the basha's house and warn him? I looked at my watch, stared at it—it seemed incredible that so much time had passed. It now lacked only twenty minutes of four o'clock. What the devil should I do? If I went to the basha's house to warn Grey I might not find him there. I probably would not; already perhaps, he had gone to the meeting Mulai Mohammed had called, perhaps had walked into a trap set for him by Belabbas. Or he might be on his way. No, I resolved, my job was to get to that meeting, in a hurry, to be there when Grey arrived, if possible, so that in case of danger I could summon the captain and his men from their hiding place across the street.

But if Belabbas were already there he would recognize me—and I had no doubt as to what he would try to do in that case. A disguise of some sort was necessary, with only a moment in which to make it. However, I must do the best I could, and trust to luck that the little alteration in my appearance would serve. Wherefore, I borrowed a piece of Idrees' turban cloth and wrapped it around my neck and the lower part of my face, as though I suffered from some ailment. Also, I dosed it liberally with a strong smelling liniment I found at hand. And over one eye I suspended, by a string around my head beneath my turban, a little flap such as is used by the semi-blind to cover the bad eye.

Then with dirt from the garden I

smeared myself a little as to face and hands and turban, exchanged my *sidéam* of blue broadcloth for one of brown homespun belonging to Idrees. I slipped another clip of cartridges into my pistol, put several other clips into my *shakarah*. Thus arrayed I started off for the meeting.

Chapter XII

THE MASKED SULTAN

IT WAS yet dark; no lightening in the east in presage of that false dawn which would for a moment light the world, as a match flickers in a darkened room before a lamp is lit. Mulai Mohammed had chosen well the time to place his fortune to the test. The sleeping town would have awakened to find itself possessed by a new regime. There would have been no struggle, because while the Moroccan natives, out of sheer love of fighting, would have united to repel an invading force, their sense of fatalism deprived them of the desire and the energy to overthrow a usurper who had already established himself.

In other words, they would contend against a thing not yet accomplished even though that thing might be best for them, but they would not oppose a change already executed, even though it might be bad for them. There is merit in this viewpoint: if the usurper maintains his position he has no cause for grudge against you who did not oppose him; if he is ousted, one can always say that at least nothing had been done in active support of the fallen usurper. Non-action has merits. When dawn should come, with the crowing of the roosters and the barking of the dogs and the odors of the steeping coffee and bubbling breakfast pots in the air, the populace of Arzila would have learned the news.

"Nevertheless, this must not interfere with breakfast," it would have said to itself, and during the breakfast interval would inevitably reach the conclusion that what had taken place must have been ordained by Allah or it would not have happened; wherefore it would be manifest sacrilege to dispute the matter.

Hence it was still in the darkness that I made my way to the house where the fateful meeting was to be held. Other pedestrians passed me in silence, hastening, I supposed, to the same destination. And when at last I reached the place I found the big front room well filled and half a dozen or more natives standing about outside, discussing in low voices the matter in hand. I paused outside to observe what was going on. The door of the house was half open, and although the room was only dimly lighted by a couple of lanterns, I could see that the floor space was pretty well covered by squatting natives.

Mulai Mohammed has not yet arrived?" I heard the question put by a native who had just come up.

"Not yet," came the answer. "All is in readiness, however; now we merely await the coming of the Sidna. No doubt he will come with Belabbas."

"Hmph!" I grunted to myself. Belabbas might come, it was true, but nothing short of a miracle would permit the masked figure of the pretender to appear in that crowded room. I thought of entering then, to ascertain if Brandon Grey had yet arrived, and yet also I wanted to stroll casually across the street to the coffee house to make sure that the captain and his men were there in readiness. I had decided to do the latter, had already taken a few steps in that direction, when someone called from the doorway for us all to enter.

I desired a station at the door, wherefore I permitted the others who had been outside to enter ahead of me. They crowded into the room, and lacking seating space, took up positions along the walls. Nowhere could I see the face or figure of my friend. As I stepped across the threshold a man with whose face I was unfamiliar, entered from a little door and paused just within it.

"Homage to our Sidna, Mulai Mohammed!" he announced.

Instantly those who were seated rose to their feet. Silence fell. I saw only the backs of heads. The faces were all toward the open door behind the man who had made the announcement. For a brief moment I think I failed to comprehend what had been said. I must have stared stupidly at the door. I remember wondering what kind of a joke the fellow was playing upon us.

And then into the room strode the masked figure. There was a mutter of blessing from the throng and deep obeisance. I gasped. Consternation seized and shook me. It was unbelievable, but true, unless my eyes lied to me. For a breath or two I was panic stricken. Something untoward had happened. And fears

came tumbling upon me. If Mulai Mohammed had made his escape from the basha's residence, where was Grey? He must have been overcome. The basha might even now be approaching with a force of followers. Was Grey alive, and if so, where? Was he dead? Were the captain of the garrison and his men really in the coffee house ready to come to my assistance at my signal? And when should I give it? The word as to the time was to have been given me by Grey, the right hand raised with first and second fingers extended. Should I take my chances now, give the signal which would bring the soldiers? Or——

I had been so occupied in my problem that I had not heard the sound of hurriedly approaching footsteps. But now I realized that two men pushed past me, That they were breathing deeply as from running. I darted a glance at them, and saw that one of them was Belabbas. Even as I perceived this—realized the added danger— heard the voice of the masked man.

"All are here?" it questioned. "The twenty-nine chiefs have come?"

"All, Sidna, all are here," replied someone.

"And the followers," continued the masked man. "They are gathered outside the Fahssi gate as was arranged?"

"Yes, Sidna. Yes—yes." A dozen voices answered.

"That is well," said Mulai Mohammed.

It required only a moment for this to take place; during that moment I stared at the masked figure, my thoughts in turmoil. The crisis had arrived. But Brandon Grey had not. I must give the signal which would summon the captain and his men. I moved my hand stealthily under my *djellaba* to grasp the pistol with which to signal. The voice of the masked man continued.

"The first thing to be done, of course, is to overpower the guard at the gate and let your men enter. After that——"

AT THAT moment my uncovered eye must have popped for the masked pretender, as he spoke, and apparently merely as a gesture of emphasis, had raised his right hand with the first and second fingers extended, the others folded into the palm. There are some things which the mind at first flatly refuses despite the senses.

"A coincidence!" something shouted in my head. "But impossible!" came another mental shout. And then I saw that the masked man, having lowered his right arm, but speaking still, had again raised it with the fingers as before.

"I desire, Oh Sidna," boomed the voice of Belabbas then, "to see again the sacred birthmark upon your breast."

"It is permitted for you to look again upon the mark." He bared his left breast, exposing the hand shaped crimson symbol.

A mutter of awe tittilated through the crowd.

"Art satisfied, Sidi Belabbas?" There was a lash in the question.

"Yes, Sidna. I—I meant not that," stammered Belabbas. "Thou art indeed the son of Mulai el-Hassan and our rightful Lord and Master." He made obeisance.

And then again the masked man's right hand rose with two fingers outstretched—and he laughed.

"I am glad of that, Belabbas," he said. "Glad indeed that you are satisfied."

With his left hand he tore away the mask—my forefinger sent two shots crashing into the night—while I stared at the laughing face of Brandon Grey.

As the two shots from my pistol echoed through the deserted streets, I became aware of two activities. The coffee house, faintly discernible now in the quickening false dawn, began to spew forth running men; within the room Brandon Grey had drawn a pistol and before the paralyzed crowd had sensed the turn of events, he had leaped past Belabbas and to me.

"There is no way out the back," he said. "Hold them here." And so side by side with level pistols we held the now enlightened and angry crowd at bay, even against the wild urgings of Belabbas.

The captain now added his pistol to ours, and looking over my shoulder I perceived that his men, three score of them at least, I judged, had formed a double ranked line from the doorway to the coffee house.

"Let them come now, as they will," he said to Grey.

"But I should prefer that you handle this matter now, Captain," said Grey.

"Good then," returned the officer, and raising his voice, commanded those within the room to come out. The game was up and most of the conspirators were aware of that fact. One or two at a time they came out, meekly enough, were passed through the lane of soldiers to the coffee house.

"There are those who will see that they are securely tied," explained the captain. "Our prison will be full tonight. That makes twenty-five so far."

"There are a few others then," said Grey, "in the back room. Including Belabbas."

"Let us go after them," suggested the captain, and on the suggestion we moved into the now empty front room. But we had not taken half a dozen steps before the little door was flung open and four men, Belabbas at their head, with a knife in either hand, rushed forth. It came as a surprise to us, took us off our guard in a way, just as will the sudden opening of a door when one is near to it. I chanced to be between Grey and the captain, and it was therefore I who met the force of Belabbas' charge. I fired, even as the big bulk struck me; then I felt myself toppled over, saw Belabbas leap through the doorway. One man, I saw, lay sprawled at the feet of the captain. The two others were wheeling about, trying to use their knives. Grey and the captain called upon them to surrender.

"Never," they cried. "Better to die here."

"Very well, then," growled the captain. "You shall have what you want." His pistol crashed twice, the two natives spun about unsteadily, like tops running down, and fell.

On the instant Grey turned and leaped through the door after Belabbas. I followed him. There came the sound of rifles, soldiers were firing at a white figure fleeing down the street, but their bullets went wild.

"Take your men now to the Fez gate," Grey called to the captain, "and disperse those ignorant fools who are gathered there. Do not harm them. They have been misled." He set off at a run, after Belabbas, and I with him. I heard the captain giving swift orders to his men, heard them falling into ranks and marching off as we ran.

Where, I wondered, was Belabbas making for. He was leading toward the Fez gate, I noticed. Possibly he thought to be able to escape through the guards, to have the door opened, to find sanctuary among the foolish followers of the false Mulai Mohammed outside the gates. And surely enough, we drew closer and closer to the portal. But abruptly Belabbas, who had a hundred yards start of us, dodged off into a side street. When we reached and entered it we saw at a little distance an open double doorway, saw the cobbles of a courtyard within. And on the instant there came the sudden crash of horse's hoofs and Belabbas dashed forth, swung his horse about and made off, the sparks flying from the animal's iron shoes. Both of us fired at the fleeing figure but the good horse seemed to be protecting Belabbas that day. Wherefore we ceased shooting and ran to the courtyard.

"We are in luck!" cried Grey. "Here are other horses!"

SWIFTLY we mounted and followed the sound made by the feet of Belabbas' horse upon the cobbled streets. It was a mad chase and a dangerous one. The streets of Arzila were not made for rapid travel. It led us across the town to the big north gate. The doors of the gate were closed, I saw, as we came within seeing distance, but I could also see the white mounted figure of Belabbas and the darker figures of the guards.

"Stop that man," shouted Grey, "in the name of the Sultan."

But even as he shouted the gates swung open, I saw the scatter of sparks as Belabbas' horse responded to the spur. The man we pursued had gained the long white beach which stretches from Arzila northward.

As we raced through the gate I saw the stupid faces of the guards with open mouths and eyes distended, but they offered no impediment to our passage. And so we, too, gained the beach and saw ahead of us, less than a hundred yards now, the fleeing horseman.

It was a contest now between horseflesh. The mount which Grey bestrode was bigger and swifter than mine. I necessarily fell behind a little. I maintained my distance with Belabbas, but Grey gained somewhat, and continued to gain. A quarter of a mile was flung behind us and he had cut in half the distance from Belabbas. Another quarter of a mile, and although I was yet almost a hundred yards behind, I saw that Grey was riding scarce a dozen feet behind the Moor. Why, I wondered, did he not shoot? He could scarcely miss at that short distance. I did not know then, as I learned later, that my friend had determined to capture Belabbas alive, but in a few moments more I witnessed a startling thing.

The head of Grey's horse was at the tail of Belabbas'. The Moor was hunched forward over the saddle. I saw Grey strike home the spurs, saw his horse leap alongside that of the Moor, on the right side. And then I saw Grey kick his right foot free of the stirrup, throw that leg over the horse's neck and leap through the air to descend upon the crouching figure of Belabbas. The next moment the two of them plunged from the beast as it reared at the impact, and fell upon the sand.

I watched the struggle as I raced toward it. Grey had fallen underneath but instantly had thrown the Moor from on top of him, and reversed the position. I saw a knife go flashing through the air; I saw Brandon Grey's right arm throw back and I was near enough now to hear the impact of a blow. When I swung from saddle, Brandon Grey had risen, and Belabbas was lying unconscious at his feet.

THUS came to an end the gamble for a throne made by one who called himself Mulai Mohammed, a gamble which was to place several feathers in the cap of my friend, Grey, and, as we learned later, to have fatal results for both the pretender and Belabbas.

A noon sun saw Kaid Wazzani, captain of the garrison marching off toward Fez with his prisoners under heavy guard, saw us riding forth for Tangier with the Señorita Valdez between us. The town was quiet. It had awakened to find its revolution fizzled, took the matter philosophically, as an affair passed and done for and went about its business. The ignorant countrymen who had gathered at their headmen's orders outside the city gates to wait until the portal should be thrown open to them for the seizure of the town, had had the real identity of the so-called Mulai Mohammed revealed to them by the basha himself, at Grey's orders, and thereupon had faded swiftly away across the plains. Sunset saw us in Tangier without untoward incident, saw the señorita placed in the hands of the Spanish consulate; after which, with sighs of relief we reached Grey's house on the Marshan and sought much needed rest. And rest well deserved, also. Perhaps the plot would not have hurled the Sultan from his throne, but still I think it had a reasonable chance of success. And so I felt that we might properly take unto ourselves a little credit for the making of history.

Or was the history really made by the little red spider, not much bigger than a pinhead, which had bitten Benjamin Lowndes in far away Singapore?

Trail Driving Days
Along the Red River

THE GREAT RED BORDER

Another Texas Cow Country Novel

by

J. E. GRINSTEAD

The Opening Feature of the
Next FRONTIER STORIES

WANTED——?

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

Author of "Beginners' Luck," "The Hermit of Tigerhead Butte," etc.

A bullet six inches from his head warned Ware's Kid that he was "warmer" in his search for the killer of Eph Carson, but even then he did not suspect how soon he was to reach the surprising end of the long trail.

WARE'S KID jogged into Dallas, coming from Austin pursuant to special orders of the adjutant general, which covered the proposed capture or burial of one Dell Spreen, who was charged with murder and robbery down El Paso way.

Horsemen passed him; farmers in wagons with their families about them. All gave the smallish figure on the black stallion a more than usually curious glance. He was dressed like a Mexican dandy—a huge black sombrero, heavy with silver bullion, shading a lean brown face and sun-narrowed gray-green eyes; a waist-length jumper of soft tanned goatskin, fringed from shoulder to elbow and with a bouquet of scarlet roses embroidered upon the back; *pantalones* of blue, with rows of twinkling silver buttons on each side of the crimson insert in the outer seam. Some of those who passed him would have instantly recognized his name. For he had wiped out Black Alec Rawles's gang two years before and so had marked his entry into the Rangers. The tale was a classic over a wide land.

But the crowd passed on unwittingly. For his white-handled Colt hung awkwardly high upon his belt and the canny readiness of sleek, brown Winchester stock to his hand was not readily apparent. Too, he was obviously no more than eighteen or nineteen years old.

On the main street Ware's Kid pulled up, this time to stare broodingly up the shallow canyon of brick and wooden buildings, almost as if he expected to see Dell Spreen—a small, deadly figure of smooth, fierce brown face and murderous black eyes—step from a doorway.

A drowsy idler upon a saloon porch, leaning comfortably against a post with feet in the dust of the street, promised information. Ware's Kid spurred over and at sound of the stallion's feet the lank one opened his eyes lazily.

"Sher'ff's office?" inquired Ware's Kid politely.

"Git to hell out o' here an' find out, if you-all's so cur'us!" snarled the loafer.

"Sher'ff's office?" repeated Ware's Kid.

Finding icy greenish eyes boring into his face, eyes lit by an uncanny electric sparkling, the loafer sat suddenly stiff-backed.

"'Scuse *me!*" he cried shakily. "But I —I shore thought you-all was a greaser! Yo' clothes an' yo'—yo'——"

Ware's Kid ignored the profuse flow of apologies. Having received his directions, he rode on. The lounger mopped damp brow with a sleeve and peered after the tall black and its small rider.

"Gawd! He's a mean 'n', I bet you!" he said. "Gent what packs a six-shooter, but reaches fer his carbeen when he's riled —I bet you he's a wolf!"

Ware's Kid swung down before the sheriff's office and hitched the stallion to a splintered post. With carbine cuddled in his arm, he crossed to stand in the doorway of the office. His roving eyes made out, in the duskiest corner, a small figure squatting against the wall.

Ware's Kid went inside. The squatting one was a boy of fifteen, barefooted, in faded overalls, gingham shirt, and ragged hat upon towy hair. His round eyes were of the palest blue and he had neither brows nor lashes, so that his gaze seemed unwinking, like a snake's.

"Sher'ff?" grunted Ware's Kid.

The boy jerked his head toward the street door and shrugged silently. Ware's Kid, after a long stare, lounged over to another corner and himself squatted upon his heels.

Presently he forgot the boy in the opposite corner. Slowly he produced Durham and brown papers and methodically built a cigarette. This he laid upon the floor before him and rolled another, then a third, fourth, fifth, sixth. They laid in a neat row. He picked up one from the end of the row and lit it.

He wondered if he were really to find Dell Spreen here in Dallas. He had not been in Carwell with Sergeant Ames, on the day three months past, when Simeon Rutter and two O-Bar riders had spurred into the tiny, sleepy village, with the word of the murder and robbery of Eph Carson, Rutter's partner.

But the sour-faced ranger sergeant had told him of the crime and of his investigations at El Castillo, the long, low rock-wall from behind which Eph Carson had been shot.

PIECING together the testimony of Rutter and the punchers and adding the result of his own observation, Ames had made a fairly complete story. Carson had been on his way back to the O-Bar with about seven thousand dollars of his and Rutter's money. During his absence, up Crow Point way, this gunman Spreen had ridden up to the O-Bar and asked for Carson. Told that he was absent, Spreen had said grimly that he would wait.

But shortly after breakfast on the day of the murder, while the ranch house was deserted except for two Mex' cooks, Spreen had disappeared. None had since seen him. Spreen knew that Carson was to return with a large sum of money. The whole ranch had known it.

Evidently, said Ames, Spreen had ridden up the Crow Point trail to ambush himself where it ran along the rock wall in the desert—El Castillo. He had not waited long—there were but two cigarette stubs in the trampled sand. Eph Carson had come squarely into range of the steadied rifle. Then—two shots and the wizened little cowman had side-slipped from the saddle to sprawl face downward, dead. Having robbed the body, Spreen had vanished as if the ground had swallowed him.

Ware's Kid went over the details of his own investigation. He had located the niche in the wall which had held the murderer's .44 rifle. He had re-created the murder; had interviewed Rutter and the O-Bar boys.

The dark, bitter-tongued rancher had told how he had ridden with the punchers up the trail toward Crow Point, when Carson's failure to return had alarmed him. Told how they had found Carson sprawled upon the sand, found his horse a quarter-mile away with bridle reins caught in the *ocotillos*.

Two weeks after the murder a peremptory summons had come to Ware's Kid from headquarters in Austin. He had found the adjutant general determined to stamp out the wave of crime then sweeping the border country. He wanted this Spreen killed or taken. Preferably the latter, that he might be hanged upon the scene of his crime.

"You wiped out Black Alec's gang," the adjutant general had said to Ware's Kid. "So I'm giving you this commission: get Dell Spreen! I don't care where you have to go to get him, either!"

Ware's Kid, who was now smoking the fifth cigarette from his layout, was aroused from his thoughts by footsteps. A stocky man clumped inside the office and sat down at the battered desk.

"Mawnin'," nodded the stocky man. The rigidity of his angular face was broken up by curiosity, as wide, alert brown eyes roved over the Mexican finery. "Somethin'?"

"Do' know," shrugged Ware's Kid.

He noted that the man wore a deputy sheriff's badge upon his open vest. He

was, perhaps, twenty-nine or thirty, though dark mustache and tiny goatee made him seem older. He was dusty as from long riding. Now he reached down stiffly and took off his spurs.

"Do' know," repeated Ware's Kid. "Sher'ff?"

"Sher'ff's up to Austin, a-powwowin' with the gov'nor. Art Willeke—Art's chief dep'ty—he's ramblin' 'round the elum-bottoms, Denton way, huntin' Sam Bass."

Mention of the notorious outlaw, who was just then keeping Rangers and peace officers frantic, solved a part of Ware's Kid's puzzle. He had been wondering whether or not to take the local officers into his confidence; tell them frankly whom he sought.

He decided to forego any help these easterners could give in locating Spreen—an East Texas man and, perhaps, one known to them—to gain the greater advantage of working without danger of warning being passed to Spreen by some friend.

"Kind o' interested in Bass," he told the deputy, thoughtfully. "Ranger. Headquarters Troop. Name's Ware."

"Ware?" cried the deputy, staring hard and somewhat unbelievingly. "Heerd about you-all! Glad to meet you!"

He shook hands and sat down again, still eyeing Ware's Kid doubtfully. Then the boy in the corner came silently to the desk. The deputy nodded to him, hesitated and turned to Ware's Kid.

"Mind if I talk to him, private?" he asked apologetically.

Ware's Kid went outside to lean against the wall. He could hear the boy's excited whispering; an occasional explosive grunt from the deputy. Then he was called inside. The boy was gone.

The deputy sat scowling down at the desk, tap-tapping the curving black butt of the long-barreled Colt at his hip. He glanced up at Ware's Kid with the odd, appraising stare he had given the small figure at first mention of his name.

"My name's Bos' Johnson," he remarked abruptly. "You-all make yo'se'f to home, here. I'll be back, right soon."

He was gone fifteen or twenty minutes and when he came in again, his face wore that expression of grim rigidity which Ware's Kid had marked upon him when first he had come into the office.

"A'right," he grunted. "Le's git yo' hawse to the stable. Then I'll buy you-all a drink."

They saw to the stallion's stabling, then crossed the street to a low, brick saloon. There were not many in it—a cowboy or two, a knot of farmers standing together far down the bar. But, drinking alone, was a huge man with sullen, red face and close-set black eyes. He turned at the pair's entrance, staring.

"Whisky," said Bos' Johnson, tonelessly. Ware's Kid nodded agreement.

THE big man watched, tugging at long mustaches and snorting loudly as if at his private thoughts. He watched belligerently while the bartender poured the drinks for Ware's Kid and Bos' Johnson.

"Bartender!" he bellowed suddenly and crashed a huge fist upon the polished bar.

"Yes, sir!" replied the bartender. His pasty face was gray-hued. "Yes, sir!"

"You-all know who I am, bartender? I ask you-all—don' you-all know what I am, huh?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Branch. Course I do. Everybody knows Bull Branch! So' do!"

Bull Branch continued to glare menacingly at him.

"Bartender!" he growled. "Since when is Mexicans 'lowed to come a-shovin' in yere a-drinkin' with white men? You-all git down there an' take that-'ere drink away from that Mex'! Then you-all chase him out'n here 'fore I git mad."

Slowly the bartender inched toward Ware's Kid—who had not yet seemed even to glance in Bull Branch's direction. When he was still six feet away, the Ranger turned his head a trifle—and regarded the bartender. The unhappy man stopped instantly, shrinking back before the uncanny electric sparkling in the gray-green eyes. Slowly, then, Ware's Kid wheeled to face Bull Branch.

"Where *I* come from—" thus the Ranger in a soft drawl—"ever' gent kills his own snakes."

"What?" roared Bull Branch, lowering big head on bull neck and glaring ferociously. *"Whut?"*

"Pop yo' whip, fella!" Ware's Kid invited him, still in the bored drawl.

Bull Branch gaped amazedly. Deliberately, he pushed back his coat flaps and put huge hands upon his hips. The pearl-gripped butts of two Colts showed, almost under his fingers. Then he bore slowly down upon the Ranger, who stood sideway

to the bar, with left elbow resting on its edge. Bos' Johnson moved unobtrusively away from the bar and out of possible line of fire. But Bull Branch made no move to draw his guns; merely came on ponderously.

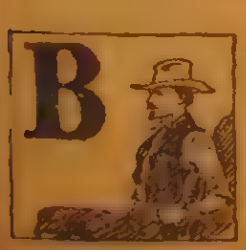
What followed was blurred like the action of a rattler's head as it strikes. The left hand of Ware's Kid moved—so rapidly that none there actually saw it move. It caught up the whisky glass from the bar and flipped the stinging liquor squarely into Bull Branch's face.

As the huge figure reeled, hands going to tortured eyes, Ware's Kid shot forward. He twitched Branch's Colts from their holsters and hurled them into a corner. He rained blows upon Bull Branch's face—leaping clear off the floor to reach that height.

It was cat-and-mastiff. Blindly, Bull Branch tried to push him off, but those hard fists, landing with force terrifically out of proportion to the small body behind them, cut his face to ribbons, closed his eyes to puffy-lidded slits, drove sickeningly into his mid-section. He staggered about the barroom, grunting, whining, helpless. At last some instinct seemed to show him the door. He broke for it at a staggering run and Ware's Kid, with a Comanche yell, leaped upon his back and spurred him through it, catching hold of the lintel and swinging down to the floor as Bull Branch lurched through and fell sprawling upon the veranda floor outside.

When he came back, the bartender was half-crouched against the back-bar, with eyes bulging. Bos' Johnson and the other patrons were clinging to the bar, some whooping feebly, others too weak to do more than shed happy tears. Bos' Johnson waggled a hand at the bartender.

"Set 'em up, bartender!" he gasped. "This 'n's on the house. Ware! Mebbe they won't neveh hi'st no monument to you-all here, but Bull Branch—he'll remembeh you-all plenty!"



BACK in the sheriff's office, Johnson turned suddenly serious again. He sat staring at the wall. His harsh face rigid as if set in bronze.

"I got you-all into that trouble with Bull Branch," Johnson said suddenly. "Done it a-purpose."

Ware's Kid merely waited, brown face, gray-green eyes, revealing nothing of his thoughts.

"Wondered if you-all really was Ware an', if you was, how much o' the talk was so. Because—I shore do need some help!"

"Fer what?"

"To go out with me tonight an' stand up to Sam Bass's gang!"

Ware's Kid studied the grimly earnest face. From the beginning he had sensed something unusual about him. He thought that Johnson was usually a happy-go-lucky cowpuncher and a man efficient with either hands or weapons. He was used to judging men quickly and he began to like this stocky deputy.

"A' right!" he grunted curtly.

"You-all willin'?" cried Johnson. "Then here's the layout. They're goin' to stick up the east-bound T & P ag'in at Eagle Ford. Figger folks won't be expectin' lightnin' to hit twict in the same place. Me 'n' you, we'll be in the weeds 'long the track."

"How-come just us two?"

"I could raise a posse," Johnson admitted. "But—how'm I goin' to know the fellas I line up ain't in with Bass? No! I'm goin' to line my sights on Simp Dunbar an' before I let some dam' spy carry word, I'll go it by myse'f!"

"Simp Dunbar? Who's he?"

"He's the skunk that killed my cousin, Billy Tucker! Two weeks ago, oveh in Tarrant. Man! I'd give a black land farm to git me Simp Dunbar oveh my front sight. An' I shore will! 'T was like this. Bass's outfit loped up to a saloon on the aidge o' Fort Worth, where Billy, he was havin' a drink. The' was some kind o' wranglin', Billy bein' the kind as won't back down fer no man livin'. Simp Dunbar—I've knowed him all my life fer a useless cus an' Billy knowed him, too—he shot from off to one side. Billy an' me, we helled around togetheh when we was kids. Punched cows togetheh, out Menard-way. I—I thought a heap o' Billy——"

Ware's Kid nodded silently. Here was a man he understood. Understood his vindictiveness, for it was in his own fierce Texan blood; understood his willingness to take a hundred-to-one chance to face his enemy. More and more, he liked Bos' Johnson.

"A' right. We'll hunt 'em up," he grunted. "How-come yuh know they're goin' to be at Eagle Ford?"

"My spy told me. Had him a-watchin' fer 'em last two weeks. That boy."

Ware's Kid stared silently at Johnson.

"What's name that other little station—east o' here?" he asked.

"Mesquite?"

"Didn't even know there was one," shrugged Ware's Kid, with a ghost of a grin. "Johnson, we'll be at Mesquite, not Eagle Ford, tonight. Boy's lyin'. In with Bass, likely. Feelin' I got, an' mostly my feelin's is right."

Johnson was won over to acceptance of the altered plan, if but half-willingly. He admitted that he knew nothing much of the boy, who had appeared in the office a month before offering to spy upon the Bass gang.

"In with Bass!" repeated the Ranger. "Hell! He could've brought yuh lots o' news, 'fore this."

THEY waited until nearly dark, then ate at a Chinese restaurant. It was pitch-dark when they went swiftly to the stable where Johnson's horse, with the big stallion, had been fed an hour before. They saddled, talking a little for the benefit of any ears that might be stretched toward them, of the western road; that toward Eagle Ford.

For a couple of miles they rode swiftly eastward, then turned south on the road to Mesquite. They were close to the railroad always, riding through woodland. Johnson led, because of his knowledge of the country. Soon he checked his mount and jerked the Winchester from its scabbard. Ware's Kid already cuddled his carbine in the crook of his arm. They rode on again, slower, now.

Suddenly, not fifty yards ahead, a man scratched a match. The Ranger jerked his carbine up. Gently he kneed the stallion around, feeling, rather than seeing, that Johnson was doing likewise. There was no alarm while they moved back a hundred yards and slipped off their animals.

"Let's hitch the hawses an' sneak up!" whispered Johnson.

They returned to the point from which they had seen the flare of that match, the stocky deputy making no more sound than a shadow—than the Ranger himself. Then they halted, squatting on their heels, to listen. There was the sound of men moving, of horses, the hum of low-voiced, jerky conversation.

"Late again!" a boyish voice complained. "Hell! You'd think we were passengers, Sam, way the dam' railroad's treating us!"

"Don't ye fret, Bub," a harsh voice answered the youngster. "She'll be a-ramblin' along right soon. Ingineer, he'll see that log an' he'll jerk her back onto her tail right suddent!"

"Ever'body lined up?" inquired a pleasant voice—Bass's, Ware's Kid surmised. "Yuh-all know where yuh work?"

As the voices answered in affirmative grunts, the Ranger began moving soundlessly to circle them to get nearer to the point where the train would stop. Johnson followed until they were squatting in a little open perhaps fifty feet from the track, sheltered by a fallen tree.

"You-all was shore right!" breathed Johnson. "Wouldn't be nowheres else in the world!"

Minutes ticked off, then there was the sound of the train, far away. The rails before them began to hum. The train was upon robbers and officers with a roar. Came a frantic squealing of brakes and the scream of the whistle.

The train had barely halted when there was a rattle of shots along the track. It was so dark that there was no clue to the robbers' positions save the orange flames that stab-stabbed the night. Ware's Kid was conscious that Johnson was gone from beside him. He wasted no time thinking of that, but ran crouched over up to the track, where he could fire at the robbers' shot-flashes. From here he went into action with coldly precise fire from the carbine.

"Who's that dam' jughead?" someone roared. Evidently, thought Ware's Kid, he was believed to be some misguided member of the gang, firing into his own people.

From between the cars came shots to answer the gang, now. It was pandemmonium, there in the pitchy night, with the heavy roar of Colt's and the sharp, whip-like reports of rifles. A man could but guess, by the relative positions of the flashes, at whom he shot.

The Ranger hardly expected to do much execution—his position made that a matter of chance. But he was worrying the Bass men.

Suddenly a high, clear, voice rang out, crying a name over and over again, penetrating even the staccato din of the firing.

"Simp Dunbar! Where you-all? Simp Dunbar——"

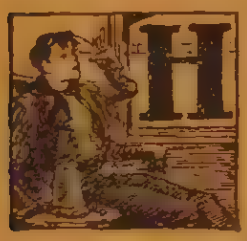
A voice answered, but there was no diminution in the firing. Ware's Kid crawled down the track, having reloaded

his carbine. With his first shot a man cried out shrilly. He pumped the lever and—his carbine jammed. He spat a bitter curse. He knew instantly what had happened—he had slipped a .45 pistol cartridge into a .44 carbine.

A huge shape hurled itself at him. Mechanically, he threw up his carbine and the oncoming man ran into it. Then Ware's Kid, tugging at the butt of his seldom-used Colt, leaped aside. A roar sounded, almost in his ear. Then a hand caught his shoulder. Instinctively he stepped close to his assailant, turned like a flash when a pistol brushed him; dropped his Colt and caught the fellow's gunhand with both of his and hung on grimly.

"Somethin's wrong, boys! Let's git out o' yere!" a cool, half-laughing voice was shouting, down the track—not the voice which had called Simp Dunbar's name.

The fellow with whom Ware's Kid grappled was swinging terrific blows at his lighter opponent. But the Ranger's head was against his chest; the big fellow's fists but grazed their mark. But he was tiring with his bulldog grip on the other's gunhand. Suddenly he released his hold and tried to leap backward. A heel caught on a bunch of grass and he stumbled. A flash and roar from in front of him; a stinging pain across his head. He crashed flat.



HE CAME to, conscious of a dull headache and, next, of a dim light over his head. After a moment of blinking, he perceived that he was sitting in a chair of a railway coach. Next he realized that the train was moving.

"How d' you-all feel, now?" inquired an anxious voice.

Painfully he turned his head and saw Bos' Johnson's worried face opposite him.

"Right puny!" he grunted truthfully.

Johnson grinned widely, relief in his brown eyes.

"What happened?" demanded Ware's Kid.

"Bullet creased you-all. You-all been pickin' daisies might' nigh a hour."

"The hell! Where we goin'? Gang git away?"

"Goin' into Dallas. Yeh, gang high-tailed it—all but Simp Dunbar," said Johnson. "Reckon they'll most all be a-lickin' some sore spots, though. Me'n' you-all did right smart o' shootin'! I hollered fer Simp an' like a dam' jughead, he spoke right up. I snuck up onto him an' told him who I was."

He lifted his arm and in the loose flannel of his shirt beneath it, showed a great hole with charred edges.

"Might' nigh got me, first crack! But I worked buttonholes up an' down his front 'fore he could shoot ag'in!"

"How-come yuh found me?"

"By lookin' around," shrugged Johnson affectionately. "You dam' red-eyed li'l runt! You-all think I'd hike out an' leave you-all out there, some'r's, fer the gang, mebbe, to find? I come runnin' up about the time you-all tumbled; see that hairpin right on top me—an' me with an empty gun! I yelled like a Comanche an' damned if he neveh broke an' run."

Ware's Kid eyed him steadily. He knew that only Johnson's arrival had kept his assailant from putting another bullet into him as he lay unconscious.

He leaned back wearily in the seat. Johnson stretched his bowed legs comfortably and took off his Stetson.

"Wisht I had a chaw," he grumbled.

"Got the makin's." Ware's Kid fumbled in his jumper pocket.

"Don't use her thet-a-way. I neveh could learn to smoke, some way."

He threw his head back and closed his eyes. And the Ranger, watching him, turned suddenly cold all over. For upon the brown, sinewy neck that had been always hidden heretofore by the silken neckerchief, shone a long white scar that stretched evenly three quarters of the way around it.

A stocky, dark-faced, dark-eyed man, with a white scar circling evenly around his neck—so Simeon Rutter and the O-Bar hands had described Dell Spreen. True, they had seen him clean-shaven. and, believing him guilty of murder, they remembered his features and eyes as murderous. But there was no doubt about it—Dell Spreen sat there across from him with closed eyes. And to Dell Spreen he owed his life that night!

"Dell Spreen!" he call in a low voice.

Bos' Johnson moved like a cat, to half-draw his Colt. Then he saw the derringer that covered him with twin barrels. For an instant he hesitated, then shoved the Colt back into its holster and slumped.

"So you-all come afteh *me*," he said. "I been lookin' fer somebody to show up. That's why I got me a job as dep'ty. Figgered whoever come'd spill his tale in the office an', seein' me wearin' a badge,

wouldn't suspicion me. Specially since I neveh used my own name in the O-Bar country. But you-all shore fooled me."

"Hate like hell to do it!" Ware's Kid wriggled miserably. "But I'm a Ranger. Do anything I can, to help yuh, Johnson. Much as I'd do fer my own blood kin. But I got to take yuh back."

"I ain't blamin' you-all. But—might's well shoot me, right now, as to put me up 'fore a jury in that country. Ever'thing's ag'inst me—specially bein' a strangeh. That's why I high-tailed it, soon's I heerd he'd been found.

"I ain't denyin' I went to the O-Bar figgerin' I'd mebbe have to kill Carson. I was goin' to git back the money he stole off'n my brotheh an' sisteh. Goin' to git it back or try the case before ol' Jedge Colt. But if I'd killed him, it'd been from the front. He'd have been give a chanct to fill his hand."

"Yuh—yuh mean yuh never killed him?" cried Ware's Kid.

Then the old surge of hope died. Of course Johnson would say that.

"D' you-all figger me that-a-way? Knowin' no more about me than you do?" Johnson asked.

Slowly, the Ranger shook his head.

"Looky yere!" argued the deputy. "Eph' Carson an' my brotheh, Sam, they was ranchin' it oveh on the Brazos. Carson's a tough *hombre*, remember. He's gamblin' a lot. Well, he sells ever' last head o' stuff on the place while Sam's down in Fort Worth. Time Sam gits back with my kid-sisteh that's got a share in the ranch, Carson's done gambled away the money. The's a row, o' course. Sam, he's got more guts than gun-sense. Carson nigh kills him.

"Time I come into it, Carson's rattled his hocks. Two years afteh, I'm ridin' down in the El Paso country. Hear about Eph' Carson o' the O-Bar. I go high-tailin' it oveh an' hang around four-five days, but Carson don't come. Then I start out fer Crow Point a-huntin' him.

"Then, hell bent, comes the Mex' cooks' helper-boy. I kept a cowboy from beatin' him to death, one day. Says Carson's killed an' robbed an' ever'body says I must've killed him! Well, whut do I do? Try to tell them red-eyed O-Bar boys as how I was intendin' to kill Eph' Carson, mebbe, but neveh got no chanct? Like hell! I figger the job I come to do is done. I leave that-'ere country in a mile-high cloud o' dust."

Ware's Kid slumped lower in the seat, going over and over his mental picture of the scene of the crime.

Bos' Johnson, rose to cup his hands against the window glass and peer out into the night. Missing no slightest movement of his prisoner, the Ranger studied again the wide, powerful shoulders, the bandy legs of the man who has ridden almost since birth. Johnson turned slowly.

"Dallas! Be in soon," he said. "Then—I ain't blamin' you-all none, Ware. But just—well sort o' between us, I wisht I could make you believe I never done it. I sort o' took to you-all from the beginnin' an——"

"'T ain't a bit o' use," interrupted Ware's Kid.

A tiny smile was born far back in the gray-green eyes; seemed to spread over the habitually blank brown face and come finally to rest upon the thin-lipped mouth.

"'T ain't a bit o' use," he repeated. "'Cause—I know yuh never done it!"

Ostentatiously he returned the derringer to his jumper pocket.

"'S all right, Bos'. Yuh got to go down to Austin with me. Got to ex-hibit yuh some to the adj'tant gin'ral, to make him sabe. But that'll be all. Listen: I went snoopin' around some myself, down at Carwell. Found where the fella that killed Eph' Carson had waited. Point one: there was two brown cigarette stubs on the ground. Yuh-all say yuh don't smoke, an' the's no stain on yo' fingers.

"I found where this fella's stood with his rifle in a sort o' notch. His foot-prints was still pretty plain. Well, yo' feet, Bos' point in, like a pigeon's. This fella's showed in the soft dirt under the rock overhang, a-pointin' out!

"But point three's the big 'n': I stand five foot seven, an' that notch he rested his Winchester in was level with my eyes. Short as yuh-all are, it'd be mighty near over yo' head! Now, he never stood on nothin', 'cause the' ain't nothin' the' to stand on. An' he never fired from no saddle. 'Cause I found where his hawse'd been tied back in the brush."

"Man, but you-all shore wiped some cold sweat off'n me!" cried Bos' Johnson. "I knowed I neveh done it, but provin' it, the way you-all just done, neveh would've come to me, I reckon."

"Took a bigger man than ary one of us. That's what we're goin' to show the adj'tant gin'ral. Then I'm goin' to ask him to let me go back to Carwell to find the fella that really done the killin'. He'll let me go. An'——"

"If he does," cried Bos' Johnson very earnestly, "man! The's shore some six-footehs down in that Carwell country as'll be up in the air two ways to onct!"

UP OUT of the glaring yellow sand, the long, low, narrow barrier of black rock jutted abruptly. "El Castillo"—the Castle, the Mexicans had named it, long ago. The name fitted as well as such names usually do. Actually it more resembled a stone fence fifty yards long, which, in height, varied from three to ten feet and, in thickness, from a foot to four, even five, feet. The top was jagged—sharp saw teeth of slick, inky rock. A sinister pile, even in the white sunlight of a desert forenoon.

Ware's Kid squatted on spurred heels at the Castle's western end, where the trail forked to run on either side of the wall. Not much of a trail, this—the deep, loose, perpetually-drifting sand soon effaced impressions; but generations of travel had made a lane between walls of greasewood and cat-claw and cactus.

It was near the Ranger's position, on this dimly-marked track, that Eph Carson had died—shot from the saddle without a chance to return the murderer's fire.

Having left Dell Spreen in the care of the adjutant general in Austin and returned swiftly to Carwell, Ware's Kid had come without being observed to the scene of the murder. Now that he knew Spreen had not committed the killing, he must decide who did.

"Satisfied the adj'tant gin'ral Spreen neveh done it," reflected the Ranger. "But I got to figure out who did. Spreen's too little. Good-size hombre plugged Eph Carson."

He got up and the great, black stallion, which had stood behind him as he squatted now followed like a dog to the spot where Eph Carson's murderer had lain in wait. Ware's Kid knew the place well.

"Fella leaned up ag'inst the rock, right here," he re-enacted the scene mentally. "Lined his sights on Carson. Carson was comin' up t' other side from over Crow Point way. Fella drilled him plumb center. Went out an' took seven thousand out o' Carson's saddle bags. Stood right here. Standin' on the ground. No hawss-tracks closer'n that cat-claw yonder. Good size' fella. Had to be, to rest his rifle in that crotch."

Mechanically he studied the rock wall and the sand that swept away from its foot. Something bright in the sand, in the very spot where they had found the murderer's tracks. He stooped. But it was only a glassy bit of rock. He held it, staring absently, his mind upon the mystery. From the little sand dunes behind him, to northward, came the flat, vicious report of a rifle. A bullet slapped the rock wall almost in his face. It had passed within six inches of his head. Instantly, another followed.

Ware's Kid moved like a rattler striking. He moved automatically, but with a precision, an economy, of movement that could not have been bettered by rehearsals times without number,. He was sheltered from the bullets within two steps, standing behind his stallion's bulk. His hand slapped the saddle horn; he was in the saddle without touching stirrups and lying flat upon the black's neck. The great rowels dug the stallion's flanks; he surged forward magnificently; within two strides he was galloping. The Ranger, chased by bullets that buzzed spitefully about his ears, swung the black around the end of the Castle.

Half-way down the length of the stone wall he slid the stallion to a halt. Here was a place where he could peer across the top between two teeth of rock. His great sombrero hung down his back by the chin-strap; from the scabbard beneath the left fender had leaped a sleek Winchester carbine. He cuddled the carbine in the crook of his arm as, with green-gray eyes squinting coldly, he studied the sand dunes behind which his antagonist lay hidden.

A thin smoke-cloud was drifting upward above the dunes. Ware's Kid rested the carbine in the crotch of the wall-top. He sighted carefully and drove three .44's to dust along the crest of the dunes, some fifteen inches apart. Instantly the other rifleman replied with a rolling quartette of bullets that bunched most efficiently beneath the Ranger's carbine-muzzle.

He watched narrowly without replying in kind. At last he shrugged and whirled the stallion, to ride off south and east toward the O-Bar ranch-house.

He could have stalked the sand dunes from which the unknown bushwhacker had fired. There was cover of a sort up to the very base of the dunes. But the ambusher's fire had been entirely too craftsmanlike, too nearly deadly, to make the prospect of scaling the low slope before him seem anything but the brief preliminary

to a funeral. Ware's Kid preferred to ride off with a whole skin and calculate upon another meeting under conditions more equal. They said of him, in the Rangers, that for a youngster no more than nineteen he had a mighty level head.

A half-mile, perhaps, he galloped without turning. Then, reaching for the field glasses, he checked the stallion. Far behind him, a horseman streaked it eastward. The Ranger studied rider and brown horse through the glasses.

"Mebbe he's tall," he grunted at last. "But—mebbe he's just a-forkin' a little pony."

FOR ten miles he kept the stallion at a mile-eating running walk. He had never been at the O-Bar house, but he knew its location from hearsay, and so, when the black began climbing a steady incline, studded by boulders and covered with taller-than-ordinary mesquite, he nodded to himself. This was the way, all right.

The stallion made the incline's top and paused for a moment, expelling its breath in a great snort. At the sound, the flaxen-haired girl on the lookout rock turned sharply. She and Ware's Kid stared, one at another, her great, dark eyes meeting his narrowed gaze levelly.

"Howdy!" he drawled, after a—to him—long and uncomfortable silence. He was always ill at ease with women. They usually wanted a man to make some sort of damned fool of himself to suit a feminine whim.

"Good morning," she replied, still examining him calmly.

"Trail to the O-Bar?" he grunted awkwardly, after another silence.

"Yes. The house is a mile away. But there's nobody there except the cook and his helper. Do you want to see my father, Sim' Rutter?"

Ware's Kid stared. He recalled nothing about a daughter on the O-Bar. And that Simeon Rutter, huge, gaunt, black-haired, black-eyed, black-bearded, grim and taciturn, should have such a daughter as this slim, fair-skinned creature seemed somehow unbelievable. She seemed to read his thoughts.

"I've been away at school—Las Cruces—convent, you know," she enlightened. "But I'm not going back—I hope."

"Stay here, huh?"

"I hope not! This is just as bad. Oh, I hate this bare, desolate country! Don't you?"

"Don't know," shrugged Ware's Kid. He had never thought about the matter, one way or the other. "Don't know—as I do."

"I want to go back East! To New York—Philadelphia—Boston—oh, all the places I've read about. Europe, too. I'm trying to get my father to sell the ranch and go traveling with me. All over the world. I've been trying to persuade him for two years. But I think he'll do it, now—maybe. His partner was killed, you know. He's all broken up over that. He doesn't say much, but it was an awful blow just the same. I think he'll sell out."

"Got to be goin'," grunted Ware's Kid. All this talk of travel was over his head. Nor had it anything to do with his particular business—the capture of Eph Carson's murderer.

"I'll ride with you. Will you get my horse? He's tied to a cat-claw over yonder."

The Ranger got the pony and brought it back. He sat his stallion, holding her animal's reins. She waited for an instant, but he was blind to her expectation that he would help her into the caddle. So she swung up unaided and jerked the reins from his hand.

As they rode almost stirrup-to-stirrup toward the ranch-house, Ware's Kid studied her covertly from beneath half-lowered sombrero brim. It dawned upon him suddenly that not yet had he seen her smile. The large, blue eyes were somber, always; she seemed to brood upon something. They rode in silence until, a half-mile or so ahead, the clutter of buildings with constituted the O-Bar holding showed against the desert shrubbery.

"I hate it!" she burst out. "Oh, how I hate it!"

Then they rode on silently again, the creak of saddle-leather, the scuffing of the animals' hoofs, the only sound, until they dismounted in the ranch yard.

There was but one horse in the cottonwood-log corral, a black gelding as large as the mount of Ware's Kid. The girl glanced at it, then toward the house.

"My father's home," she said tonelessly. "Come in."

They went around the house and, upon the rough veranda that shaded its front, found Simeon Rutter with feet cocked upon the rail, big, shaggy head upon his chest. He looked up at the sound of their

footsteps and sun-narrowed black eyes softened amazingly as he saw his daughter.

"Hello, Baby!" he rumbled. "Wonderin' where yuh was." Then, to Ware's Kid, "Howdy, Kid. What're yuh doin' down here ag'in? Thought they sent yuh up to Austin, or some'r's."

"Did. But sent me back. I got Dell Spreen."

"Yuh did! That's shore good hearin', Kid!" He came swiftly to his feet, with great hands hard-clenched.

The girl had gone indoors and bitterly, yet with a certain grim repression, Simeon Rutter cursed Dell Spreen.

"Where's Spreen, now?" he demanded, breaking off suddenly. "Carwell? El Paso?"

"Austin. Lookin' up more evidence."

Simeon Rutter cursed the law's dawdling ways; its coddling of an assassin. Ware's Kid but half-listened. He was thinking of the efficient rifleman of the morning, who had bushwhacked him from the sand dunes.

"How many big men in this country?" he asked abruptly. "*Big* men?"

Rutter stopped short to stare at him. Then he considered the question, eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Don't know. Me, o' course. An' Curly Gonzales over Crow Point way. Lamson—that crazy puncher on the D-5—an' Slim Nichols on the Flyin' A. All I think of. Why?"

The Ranger hesitated. Knowing Rutter's bitterness toward Dell Spreen, he wondered if the dour ranchman could be made to believe his own theory: that Spreen had not, could not have, committed the murder. Wondered, too, if Rutter would be silent about the theory.

"Spreen says he never killed Carson," he said slowly.

"Yeh. An' what?"

"An' if he did—well, I don't know how he done it!"

"What're yuh drivin' at? Yut got the name o' bein' level-headed, Kid, but—what're yuh drivin' at?"

"How could a little fella—litter'n me—shoot Carson, restin' his gun in a crotch near as high as he could reach?"

Scowling, Simeon Rutter considered this problem.

"That *was* a high crotch—one that we found his tracks under," he admitted. "But, hell! He was sittin' on a hawss, or else standin' on somethin'. Not good enough, Kid! By God, not half good enough to make me believe Dell Spreen never shot old Eph Carson from hidin'. O' course he denies it! 'Spect him to own right up?"

"Yeh. Course, he'd say he never. But I been thinkin'. Wasn't no hawss-tracks under the crotch. Nothin' to stand on. Nothin' we could see, anyhow. So' wondered who'd be tall enough to shoot out o' that crotch, standin' on the sand. An', too——"

He hesitated for an instant before he decided to tell of the morning.

"An', too, somebody bushwhacked me, out at the Castle, today!"

"Bushwhacked yuh! What for? Who'd be a-bushwhackin' yuh?"

"Don't know. Fella on a dun. Good shot, too. Purty good, that is."

"Here!" cried Rutter suddenly. "Too much funny business about this. I want to see that place ag'in. Git yo' hawss, Kid. Let's take a *pasear* out to the Castle an' look around."

He went swiftly down to the corral and got the lariat from his saddle. The black gelding retreated to a corner, snorting, whirling. Rutter sent the loop spinning over its head and hauled the animal to him by sheer brute force.

"So dam' many hawsses none gits rid enough!" he rumbled irritably. "Wilder'n antelope, all of 'em."

He saddled swiftly and swung up. Ware's Kid was already mounted. They turned past the front veranda and Rutter waved to his daughter, who had come outside again. He seemed another person when near her. The grim shell of him cracked and a tenderness odd in a man so aparently harsh-grained showed for a moment.

"Goin' out to El Castillo!" he shouted at the girl. "Back when I git back, Baby."

THEY rode silently for miles. Rutter was one after the Ranger's own heart, taciturn, efficient in his business. Staring at his companion's broad back, Ware's Kid nodded approval. He thought of what the girl had said—of her father's repressed sorrow over his partner's death. He could understand Rutter's vengefulness toward Dell Spreen, but he hoped, before the day's end, to show the O-Bar owner his error, to prove that Spreen could not have murdered Eph Carson.

"If yuh're right about this height busi-

ness," Rutter growled suddenly. "I don't know what we're goin' to do about it. Too long ago, now. Not that I'm admittin' yuh're right! But, just in case yuh are, how can we find out where these fellas—Curly Gonzales an' Lamson an' Nichols—was that day? Fella don't always recollect just what he was doin' three months ago. By George!"

He whirled sideway in the saddle.

"That mornin', me an' August Koenig—one o' my hands—was ridin' nawth o' the house nine-ten mile. An' we met Lamson headin' for Elizario! Recollect, now, August an' Lamson come near mixin' it, 'count August he was askin' about some widder that lives in Elizario an' Lamson flew off the handle! By George!"

"What kind o' fella's Lamson?" inquired Ware's Kid.

"Oh, same's most. Gits kind o' crazy spells. Been kicked on the head a long time ago by a bronc' an' once in a while he flies up. But he's a good puncher an' I don't know why anybody'd think he'd shoot Eph Carson. Lamson's seen trouble—seen it fair an' square, through the smoke. No-o, I wouldn't put him down for that kind o' killer."

"Yuh found Carson right after noon, didn't yuh?"

"Yeh. I got fidgety, him not comin' in the day I figgered. So when me an' August got back to the house, an' Eph hadn't come in yet, I took August an' Yavapai Wiggins an' we rode out. Found Eph 'long about two o'clock, lyin' in the trail. Seven thousand, about, he was packin'. All gone."

"Mostly yo's, they say."

"'Bout four thousand," Rutter nodded gloomily. "But 't wasn't the money riled me so. Old Eph, he never knowed what hit him. Never had a chanct. Nary chanct to git his six-shooter out. Like I told yuh then, right after it happened, I figgered Dell Spreen 'cause he'd hung around the ranch three days, waitin' for Eph. Wouldn't tell nobody what he wanted. Just looked mean. An' packed his *cantinas* an' hightailed it that very mawnin'. I gethered yuh never found the money on him?"

"Fo' dollars, 'bout," shrugged Ware's Kid.

They came to the Castle and reined in the animals on the spot where the murderer of Eph Carson had waited. Silently, Simeon Rutters stared at the crotch in the rock wall in which the assassin had rested his rifle-barrel. Slowly, as unwilling even now to concede weight to the theory the Ranger had advanced tentatively, he nodded.

"The' wasn't no hawss-tracks closer'n that cat-claw yonder," he admitted.

He swung down and pulled his Winchester from its scabbard, then moved over to the crotch in the wall. Even for one of his height it was a strain to level the barrel with butt at shoulder. He nodded again and set the rifle down. From a shirt pocket he brought Durham and papers and shook tobacco onto the brown leaf, somber black eyes roving.

Ware's Kid slipped from the saddle and came swiftly over to where Rutter stood. He stopped and dug into the sand at the rancher's feet, then straightened.

"What's it?" asked Rutter.

It was a large, pearl-handled pocket-knife, tarnished from much carrying, with four good blades and one broken blade-stump. Rutter licked his cigarette, jambed it into his mouth and took the knife from the Ranger's hand, staring thoughtfully.

"See it before?" asked Ware's Kid. Rutter shook his head.

"Umm—no, reckon not. Not many like that carried in this country. But somebody ought to know it. We'll ride into Carwell pretty soon. See. But right now I want to ride Eph Carson's back-trail. Got a idee. Mebbe she won't pan out."

They could only guess that Eph Carson had come along the regular trail and follow through the dim lane between the greasewood and cacti. They rode silently, with eyes roving from trail to skyline and back again. The afternoon wore on; evening came. To westward, up-thrusting hills, jagged, fantastic, drew nearer.

"Huecos!" grunted Rutter, and Ware's Kid nodded. He knew this ancient watering place of the desert people red and brown and white. A good many times, with a Ranger detachment from Ysleta, hunting Apache sign, he had camped there.

"Guess we better hole up there t'night," Rutter grunted, staring across the flat to the beginning of that welter of arroyo-cut hillocks. "Mawnin' we can head back to Carwell an' see 'bout that frogsticker. Or, we can look over some more trail."

"Yo' idee?" queried Ware's Kid. "Yuh said yuh had one."

"Tell yuh about it come mawnin'," said Rutter. Far back in the grim black eyes lurked a shadowy amusement. "Ain't quite ready to back her up clean to the tail-[illegible] Got anything to eat?"

"Dried beef, *tortillas*, coffee, can o' plums."

"Dried beef an' *tortillas* is a meal," grinned Rutter. "Le's head for the Tanks an' camp."

"Better hole up in the old Butterfield station," counseled Ware's Kid. "Healthier'n sleepin' 'longside the main *tinaja*.* Apaches don't stick no closer to the reservation than ever, I reckon."

"Not so close, by God!" swore Rutter. "Yuh're right, Kid. Them dam' feather dusters stops here or at Crow Springs or the Cornudas, reg'lar, comin' from Mescalero to Chihuahua. Stage station she is. We'll make it."

They nodded mutual agreement and spurred the horses on through the dark. At the deserted stage station—a rude dwelling made by walling in the mouth of a natural cavern—they swung down. The Ranger sniffed like a hunting dog.

"Some seep water up the canyon a piece," he muttered. "Good enough for the hawsses. But I'll take the canteen an' git some real water at the Tank, for us."

HE UNSADDLED the black stallion and swiftly Rutter followed his example. Rutter got out the food and coffee pot from the Ranger's saddle bags while the latter, bearing a canteen, started up the canyon to the main "tank."

Ware's Kid moved silently, for all his high-heeled boots. The canyon floor was of hard-packed earth, but studded with loose stones and he placed his feet carefully. One never knew who might be using the Tanks. From time immemorial it had been one of the favorite watering places of this region. Wild animals and wild men, red and brown and white, came there furtively.

He passed close along the left-hand wall, decorated with Indian pictographs and the names of pioneers, and so came to the low cavern in which was the spring-fed well, or "tank." More cautiously than ever he moved now. The rock apron before the cavern was pitted with *metate*-holes, where prehistoric tribes had ground their corn; rude mortars still used by the Apaches who camped there. It was tricky footing and trickier still inside, where one approached the well-lip over a stone floor worn slick as glass by countless feet.

Inside the cavern-mouth he squatted for a moment and listened. He heard nothing from without or within and slid his feet carefully forward, balancing himself with left hand upon a rounded slab that divided the cavern in two sections.

So he was awkwardly balanced when a sinewy arm shot around his throat from behind and a *hough* sounded in his ear.

A smallish, rather insignificant-seeming figure was Ware's Kid. But "all whalebone and whang-leather," as the Rangers who had wrestled with him remarked amazedly; a hundred and ten pounds of wiry, flashingly quick, steel-strong body.

Now he moved automatically, fairly shouting, "Indians!" Sideways he whirled, and so the Apache's knife went wide in its downward drive. Back shot the Ranger's head, to smash into the Indian's face. It broke his strangling hold and Ware's Kid, turning half in air, his feet were sliding so, shot a vicious fist into the Apache's midriff, then had the buck by the throat and was gripping him about the body with legs closing like scissor-blades and fending off flailing arms with elbows spread.

The Apache was powerful, but before he had much opportunity to struggle Ware's Kid had banged his back-head against the rock. He managed a long, loud, gasping groan. Feebly his knife-hand rose. The Ranger loosed the throat for an instant and fumbled for the weapon. It sliced his palm. Then he seized it and buried it in the Indian's body.

When the Apache was limp—wise men made very sure that Apaches were really dead—the Ranger stood up shakily and groped for the entrance. A stone slid down into the canyon and he hurled himself forward out of the cavern. As he gained the middle of the canyon, running like a quarter-horse, there was thud after thud of feet dropping from the rocks to the hard ground.

He ran on his toes, hoping that he could make camp sufficiently ahead of these fleet Indians to warn Rutter; hoping, too, that Rutter had the horses together, had not taken them out onto the flat to graze. He ran as he never had run in his life.

At last he sensed the camp just ahead. And from it came a rifle-shot, then another. The bullets sang past him perilously close.

"It's—Ware's Kid!" he gasped. "Injuns—comin'!"

"Thought yuh was one of 'em!" grunted Rutter, with no particular alarm evident in his heavy voice. "How close?"

* Tank

"Right behind! No time to saddle! Fork 'em bareback!"

He paused only to snatch his precious carbine from its scabbard on the saddle, then scooped up the bight of the lariat with which the stallion was picketed. He vaulted upon the stallion's back. Muffled sound in the darkness nearby told that Rutter was following his example.

Up the canyon the darkness was suddenly punctuated in a half-dozen places by orange flames. Bullets thudded into the ground, into rock walls, around the white men. The firing was a continuous roll, its rumbling multiplied by the canyon walls. As usual the Apaches had rifles as good as any in that country, better than those of the Army. Rutter swore venomously.

Ware's Kid had slashed the lariat with his belt knife. Rutter, apparently, had done the same. For when the black stallion surged ahead, toward the safety of the open land, Rutter was close behind. They galloped furiously for perhaps half an hour. The moon came out and flooded the desert with a white light that reminded the Ranger of Billy Conant's New Fashion Saloon in El Paso when the electric lights were turned on.

Being lighter and, perhaps, the better rider, Ware's Kid led. He had lost a hundred dollar saddle, but he was phlegmatic about that. It was all in the game. They were lucky—he especially—to be riding away with their hair. A sudden groan from Rutter aroused him from his thoughts and he looked backward under his arm in time to see the big man slide sideways off his gelding and roll over upon his side.

MECHANICALLY Ware's Kid whirled the stallion and glared half-a-dozen ways at once in search of the assassin. But the broad expanse of greasewood and cacti lay quiet in the incandescent moonlight. So he rode back to Rutter and slid to the sand.

"Got me!" Rutter gasped. "Back yonder. Thought I—could make it—back to the ranch—see—my girl—but——"

"Let's see," grunted Ware's Kid practically.

He explored the blood-caked shirt-front and lifted a shoulder-point in a little gesture of fatalistic resignation. There was a .44 hole in Rutter's chest. How he had ridden this far was the marvel! The Ranger squatted there broodingly, watching mechanically along the back-trail, in case the Indians appeared.

"Want me to—sign a paper?"

At the painful whisper, Ware's Kid looked down curiously into Rutter's grim-lined face.

"Shore," he nodded, after a moment, thinking to humor a delirious man. "If it'll ease yuh."

"Knowed yuh—had the deadwood on me—when yuh—found my knife! But I—wasn't goin' to—let yuh see Carwell ag'in—ever! Yuh tried to—make out yuh never—suspicioned. But I knowed! I'd've got yuh—'fore mawnin'. Dam' near got yuh—yeste'day mawnin'—at the Castle. Seen yuh—pokin' round—pick up somethin'—skeered me an'—I whanged away. Hadn't missed—wouldn't be here. 'Twas on the—cards—I reckon."

He stopped wearily, breathing in labored wheezes. Ware's Kid squatted beside him, staring down with expressionless face. Suddenly Rutter's wheezes became louder, quicker. After a moment the Ranger understood that it was horrible laughter.

"Reckon my gal—will do her travelin'—now. Always after me—to sell out. I done for Eph Carson—'count o' that. None o' that—money was mine. All his'n. I wanted it. I——"

His voice trailed off into incoherent mumbling. Ware's Kid bethought himself suddenly of what Rutter had said about signing a paper. He fumbled in his jumper pocket and found a letter of the adjutant general, the letter which had summoned him to Austin three months ago and so had brought him, indirectly, to sit here tonight. A stub of pencil was there, too.

"A' right!" he snapped. "Sign the paper!"

He supported the murderer's head and shoulders and crooked his knee so that Rutter could lay the paper upon it. It was slow, painful work, but at last he held the curt scrawl up in the moonlight and painfully spelled it out:

Dell spreen never killed eph Carson I done it and robbed him—Simeon Rutter.

Presently Rutter died—without pain, apparently. Ware's Kid rolled a cigarette and lit it, staring blankly straight ahead.

"He shore fooled me!" he grunted admiringly. "He shore did! An' like to killed me twict! At the Castle an' tonight. He never took me for no Injun. He was aimin' to down me. Just fools'

luck I'm here, alive an' kickin', an' with this-here paper."

He got up, thinking to ride for Carwell and tell his story; show the confession. Suddenly he thought of the girl, the wistful-eyed, sad-faced girl at the O-Bar ranch-house. He squatted again and made another cigarette.

Slowly but surely, he mulled the business over. It came to him finally that there were really but two persons to be considered—Dell Spreen, sitting around the adjutant general's office up at Austin, and that girl of Rutter's. Absolute vindication of Spreen was easy; the means lay in his hand, here. But that would mean a blow at a girl who had had no part in her father's cold-blooded deed. He pondered the problem. At last, he nodded.

He would ride back to Carwell, but the paper would remain in his jumper pocket. He would tell of Rutter's death; lead a posse after the Apaches. He would also show the townsfolk the spot from which Eph Carson had been shot and explain the impossibility of Dell Spreen—a man shorter, even, than himself—committing the murder. This might not clear up the mystery to everyone's satisfaction, but Dell Spreen had no intention of coming back to this part of the country anyway. When the adjutant general saw the confession it would clear Spreen officially.

Then the girl would not be branded—openly, at least—as the daughter of a brutal, callous murderer. She would have no ordeal to face while the O-Bar was being sold. She would carry away no bitter memories to mark her in after-years.

Something like this Ware's Kid thought out. He got up again and snapped his fingers to the black stallion, caught the trailing lariat and again threw a hackamore around the black's nose, then vaulted upon it with carbine across his arm.

"Reckon she's poor law—this way," he reflected. "But she's shore as hell good Rangerin'!"

A FIRST-CLASS RACE HORSE

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

AT AN army post on the plains, in the early days, the officers of the garrison had some good horses, knew it, and were proud of them. The best was a thoroughbred, noted locally for its speed. One day a band of Indians stopped at the post and managed, with difficulty, to get the talk turned to racing, and it was not long before a race was arranged. They had with them a big buck and his disreputable pony. Its forelegs looked to be about three inches thick; its coat was rough, long, dirty and filled with burrs. The distance was to be two hundred yards, and neither side had grave doubts regarding the issue, which materially helped along the betting.

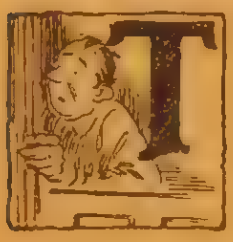
When the word was given the big buck let out a yell, plied his whip and was yards down the course before the thoroughbred knew it was in a race. The pony won by a very scant margin. The officers paid, believed they had two horses that could get away quicker, and they proposed another race. There was more betting during the hour allowed for the pony to rest, and the second race was run, with the same result as the first. A third was proposed, accepted by the Indians, and another hour's rest given the pony.

Again the pony got away like a cat, but this time its big rider turned around, facing its rump, and made uncomplimentary signs with his hands while he really let the pony out, winning by a large margin. The band collected its winnings and rode laughingly away. Later it was learned that the big buck and his miserable pony had been around a six-months circuit of Indian tribes and bands, running against the best animals the other Indians could bring against him, and had returned with over four hundred ponies as his winnings. In that short distance the thoroughbred was beaten before it could get the full benefit of its longer stride.

THE SON OF A SEA COOK

By S. B. H. HURST

The cook wasn't a cook; the son wasn't a son, and the rat had two legs. Shipmates, the skipper was tough, but before they finished with him the old man was talking in whispers.



THE *Halcyon*, leaving San Francisco, had dropped the pilot and the decks were being cleared up. A small and very nervous man peeped out of the galley door. He was the ship's cook. He looked aft and forward, watching the men at work. He looked at many men, carefully sizing them up, shaking his head mournfully as his gaze left one to linger on another. But when at last his eyes rested upon a man who bore the earmarks of a prizefighter in the heavyweight division, the cook, while still nervous, looked less like a man about to be hanged. He beckoned the big man, who lurched to the galley door. The husky sailor was in a nasty mood, and glared at the scared cook.

Finding it difficult to begin the interview, the cook remembered his polite bringing up. This terrible looking man must have relatives.

"How's your father?" stammered the cook.

"Oh, you know the old man, do you? I don't suppose he left a bottle with you for me?" The big man's eyes roamed about the galley, as if looking for something.

The cook sighed.

"I wish I had a son like you," he said sadly. "I'd be a proud man!"

"Why didn't you ask father to let you adopt me, then?" grinned the big man.

"What's your name?" asked the cook.

"Jones!"

"No, I mean your first name," said the cook, insistent for all his timidity. "I like you and would like to call you by your first name—like you was my son!"

The mystified Jones opened his mouth to make unpolite retort. Then he thought better of it. A cook can be a good friend to a hungry sailor.

"My name is Epictetus," he said simply.

"What?" The cook leaned feebly against the galley door. "Did you say Epictetus?"

"Yes," the big man shook his head mournfully. "But it ain't my fault. Father forgot what he wanted to name me, so he left it to the minister, and Epictetus is what the minister did!"

"Too bad," said the cook sympathetically.

"What's the matter with Epictetus for a name?" the big man growled ominously.

"Oh, nothing," placated the cook. "It's the fanciest name I ever heard."

"There was a king or something named Epictetus once." The big man seemed to muse upon past glories.

"No?" said the cook respectfully.

"Don't you dare say there wasn't!"

"I didn't!"

"You'd better not. But what did you beckon me here for?"

The cook became nervously confidential. He leaned close to Epictetus Jones.

"You see, I'm the cook."

"Of course I can see it!" Epictetus glared. "What would you be doing in the galley if you wasn't?"

"But I ain't a cook," the little man shivered.

"You're a cook but you ain't a cook. Don't you dare talk like that to me!"

"I mean I ain't a cook—I don't know how to cook!"

"Oh," said Epictetus sternly. "Then what are you doing in there—cooking under false pretenses? You ought to be arrested! Think of the poor hungry sailors expecting supper. But you won't be arrested. You'll wish you was! You'll be hung! At the yard arm! I'll get the rope ready myself!"

The big man turned his head away. Then he turned it back again and stared with judicious solemnity at the unhappy imposter.

"Maybe you're a murderer in disguise! A poisoner!" Epictetus resumed. "I'll go aft and tell the Old Man that I recognize your picture in the paper—the escaped poisoner—and you come aboard this decent ship to practice your dirty poisoning on us innocent sailors! I'll tell the Old Man!" But Epictetus lingered, his thirsty eyes roving brightly about the galley.

"Wait a minute," the cook pleaded. "That's what I wanted you for—because I can't cook!"

"Well, I can't, neither."

"I don't want you to— want you to be my son!"

Epictetus Jones spat expressively. Then he spoke to himself very gravely.

"No, the poor feller ain't no murderer—leastwise, he was crazy when he done it. He must have escaped from some insane asylum. It's my duty to go and tell the Old Man, immediate!"

The cook gripped his arm.

"No, I ain't! Listen!" he urged. "It's money in your pocket. And a bottle!"

Epictetus leaned over the galley half-door, the past life of the cook no longer troubling him.

"Where is it?" he asked, almost gently.

"Only if you promise to say you're my son—tell everybody that I'm your father!"

"I'd tell them you was my grandmother for a bottle of booze," Epictetus answered kindly, now actually believing that the cook was not quite right in the head. "But you must have married young!"

"I don't look my age," said the cook proudly.

"All right, Daddy! But let's see the bottle—quick! The mate will see me and holler at me for loafing here."

"You'll say that I got into a bit of trouble, and that you brought me here along of you so as you could take care of me. I'll maybe need protection when the men try to eat supper," said the cook. "And I'll give you the bottle now, and ten dollars when we get to New York—if you don't let anybody hit me."

"I'll see to that," grinned Epictetus. "What did you do to get into trouble? What was you working at before you ran away?"

"I sold ladies' fancy wear," confessed the sea cook.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," replied Epictetus severely. "But I'll forgive you—for a bottle. But you never met my old dad in that business?"

The cook flushed, shaking his head. "When I wanted you for a son I—I imagined about your father," he declared lamely.

"He'll kill you if he ever finds out," grinned Epictetus. "Bit of a liar, ain't you? Are you lying about that bottle?"

His expression made the cook produce the bottle in some haste.

"You won't let them hit me?" he implored as he handed it over.

"I'd like to see them try," said Epictetus fiercely.

"But I don't want them to try," the cook shivered.

"All right. Don't bother me now. I want to slip into the forecastle and get this into me," answered Epictetus, hiding "this" under his shirt.

"And you'll say you're my son—then they won't know I paid you to take care of me?" the cook implored.

"Sure, even if they do think I'm a son of a sea cook!" Epictetus seemed proud of his pleasantry. "But they'd better not call me anything worse. That's bad enough!" And Epictetus, hugging pleasant anticipations, left the galley door.

N OLD-TIME sailing ship, a fine fair wind, afternoon sunlight mellowing toward sunset. A joyous picture, but the cook did not notice it. He was almost a nervous wreck, his view of things distorted, like a scared kid who

had tried to bribe the school bully to protect him from the other kids. He had never cooked. He had never been to sea before. It was nearing supper time. The cook looked at his truly awful efforts in that direction and groaned.

"If I could only get the fire to burn maybe it would be better. I wish I'd stayed and faced it instead of running away. But no, I daren't do that. They can't do more than hit me here. And Epictetus may stop them doing that!"

The steward came forward to the galley.

"The Old Man says he's hungry—hurry supper along, will you?" he said, stepping inside.

Then he gave one startled look at the havoc; he surveyed for several seconds the ex-dealer in ladies' fancy wear; he passed a hand over the cold, or at least tepid, stove. His outraged feelings choked him, while a chill fear of a hungry captain's wrath gripped his vitals.

"What—what—what—what?" the steward gasped.

"I can't cook—I never did cook!" The cook screamed like a man under the knife. Then he sat down, weeping.

The steward, who was not a strong man, saw one weaker than himself—one who could be offered as a sacrifice to an offended captain. He leaped at the cook, yelling bravely.

"You would come aboard here, would you, spoiling good food? I'll teach you, you mangy half-size dock rat!" he shrilled.

A huge shadow blotted out the glow of the setting sun. It was Epictetus, so bathed in alcohol that he emitted a radiance. Or it may have been the sun trying to shine around him. His well-warmed mind had dreamed of another bottle in the galley. He had come to seek it, and his mood told him that all the world could not prevent his getting that other bottle. He saw the steward leaping at the cook, and his mood told him that all the rest of the world also wanted that other bottle.

"I might have known it," he whispered. Then he leaped, shouting, into battle—and all the ship, hearing that shout, came running to enjoy. As they came they heard noises.

"What's all that damned row about forrard there?" shouted the captain, who was standing aft.

"A bloke's killin' the bleedin' steward, sir. That's all!" a Cockney yelled back, not turning his head lest he miss something.

This to a hungry captain waiting impatiently for the steward to bring his supper aft. He ran forward and pushed through the crowd milling around the galley.

"Why don't you stop it, Mister?" he shouted at the mate.

The mate remained discreetly silent.

A large copper boiler whizzed past the captain's head. He ducked, but he was brave and charged again, determined to get into the galley. He saw Epictetus—who apparently had successfully murdered the steward—engaged in wrecking the place. A vague memory of a dog tearing up the earth trying to find a rat flashed through the mind of the captain, but it did not inform him that the huge Epictetus was seeking a bottle. Still dodging flying utensils, the captain observed a small man huddled trembling into a corner. This, the captain correctly deduced, was the cook.

When there was nothing left to throw out of the door except the stove, which would have stuck, Epictetus, oblivious to captain, officers and crew, turned upon the cook and shook him—but not dangerously. While doing this he placed a thoughtful foot upon the steward, as if to prevent a possible resurrection.

"Where's the bottle?" he panted.

The unfortunate cook made inarticulate sounds, while the captain, backed by both mates, the carpenter and sailmaker, rushed into the galley, stepping upon the steward, who gave signs of life. With five men attacking him, Epictetus really began to fight. The Cockney and others favored with ringside places crooned in ecstasy. For all that Epictetus had done before had been as a mere zephyr to a howling hurricane. But finally numbers prevailed—in the sense that Epictetus, somewhat out of condition, got out of breath. Leaving his four assistants to anchor Epictetus, the captain, his nose bleeding, turned savagely upon the cook.

"What's this maniac doing in here? Who is he?" he demanded.

"He's my son, sir!" the cook answered with the utmost affection, and not without pride.

HE captain stared incredulously from the nervous little man to Epictetus who resembled most curiously the blood-sweating Behemoth of Holy Writ as depicted by circus posters. Therefore the cook, who was an ex-

cellent salesman, hastened to explain.

"He takes after his mother, sir!"

"That's why he wrecked the galley," muttered the steward, stirring painfully.

"Don't try to be clever, Steward," said the captain severely. "What's your name? I'm going to log you for this!" he demanded of the disturber.

The son of a sea cook scowled like a crocodile.

"Epictetus," he replied unpleasantly.

"What?"

"It wasn't his fault, sir," the cook pleaded soothingly. "It was the minister. His full name is Epictetus Jones."

"So!" The captain condescended to become facetious. "Then I suppose your name is Davy! Well, Davy Jones, your offspring with the fancy name will be logged and have his pay stopped until this mess is paid for. And I'll put him in irons till he gets sober."

"That's why he wrecked the galley" moaned the steward, as if it were the burden of a song.

"What do you mean, Steward?" the captain inquired.

"He knows his father can't cook, and he wrecked the galley so as to hide the awful mess his father had made of the supper, sir!"

Epictetus grinned, filially.

"And I can't get you any supper, sir," went on the steward. "Not because the cook ain't a cook, because I'm a better cook than any ship's cook, but because there ain't no galley, sir!" He seemed to discuss the matter with himself. "Only a mechanic would have a chance. And he would have to be a wonderful mechanic!"

"Get up and shut up," growled the hungry captain. "You're mechanic enough to handle a can-opener, aren't you?" He turned and relieved the carpenter, who was clinging manfully to the right arm of Epictetus. "Go and get the irons, Chips. We'll iron this animal to a stanchion. If he breaks away from that I'll shoot him!" And in spite of the valiant struggles of Epictetus this was done.

With the son helpless the captain turned upon the father.

"What do you mean—signing on as cook when you're not a cook?" he accused.

The cook blushed, but did not answer.

"Why did you run away to sea?" asked the captain in the voice of one who demands the truth.

"Just a bit of trouble about a lady, sir," the cook smirked.

The crowd peered. Neither did any man believe the cook.

"Lady," snorted the captain. "Well, maybe a lady mistook you for a cockroach and stepped on you and slipped and hurt herself!" Captains of sailing ships were seldom polite, and this was a very impolite captain. "Get into the forecastle. You're disrated—no longer cook but ordinary seaman. And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul, if you have one, when the second mate chases around the deck what the men leave alive!"

THE shades of night fell upon the scene. With can-openers and other implements the steward managed to feed the ship's company. From the forecastle came a sound of revelry, but this was not caused by the food, but by the ex-cook—who was entertaining.

The second mate came casually to where the rapidly sobering Epictetus embraced an iron stanchion. The second mate lit his pipe and contemplated the prisoner.

"Kind of cold and skinny thing for a man to have his arms around, eh?" he said.

"Yes, sir," Epictetus grinned. When sober he was that magnificent thing, a first class sailor.

"The captain was saying just now that he thought you might be a good man at your work," went on the second mate.

"Other captains have said so, sir," answered Epictetus respectfully.

"Well, I'll let you go, then. You can go forward and get your supper, and if some man has eaten your whack I'll not say a word if you take it out of him. But if you start any trouble with the afterguard or wreck any more galleys you'll be shot, see? Neither the mate or myself are elephant men, so be reasonable."

"I'll do my work, sir, thank you," said Epictetus as the welcome key was inserted into the handcuffs. "But you know how it is yourself, sir, when you've been drunk for a month and the stuff's dying out of you, and you think someone is hiding a bottle, sir!"

"I do," said the second mate feelingly. "Now go forrard—we'll be picking watches in a little while."

Epictetus went forward. At the forecastle door he paused, surveying the performance. The men appeared to be visiting the sin of the son upon the father. They had made him wait upon them and

do all the forecastle work, and now they were "playing the ring." A circle of men formed around the ex-cook were pushing and buffeting him from one to the other. The ex-cook was weeping and pleading for mercy—as many other and stronger men have done in a similar situation. A sudden sympathy for the poor little chap came over Epictetus.

"Stop it," he commanded, stepping over the door combing.

They stopped suddenly, awed by his size and his recent exploits. But the Cockney shrilled them into action.

"Aw, he's not so much! What if 'e did 'old the Old Man and the bleedin' afterguard? There's twenty of us 'ere!"

"Pass him around, boys," shouted another, giving the ex-cook a push to start him on his way.

Epictetus said nothing. But he acted. And the noise of his acting floated aft.

"Is that fellow at it again?" bellowed the captain, grabbing a gun and running forward, the mates at his heels.

This time he was not bombarded by boilers or cooking utensils, but by sailors. Epictetus was throwing them out of the forecastle. That is, some of them. But as the captain dodged a flying sailor's feet he saw that no more dodging would be necessary. Epictetus had disappeared under a squirming mass. He was being suffocated, killed, but he made no outcry. The ex-cook, in an ecstasy of agony, had crawled for safety into an upper bunk. This fight was serious. The captain fired at the forecastle roof as he dashed in.

"Stop it," he shouted, "or I'll empty this gun into you!"

The squirming stopped, and under the threat of the gun the mates went into the forecastle and disentangled Epictetus. He breathed heavily for a moment, and then addressed the captain with much respect.

"Thank you, sir! If you and the mates hadn't come along these fellers might have made my nose bleed or something and blooded my shore-going shirt. Now, sir, to show you I appreciate what you did, I'll fight all hands—two at a time—and you can look on and enjoy yourself."

The captain grinned, but regretfully declined this magnificent offer.

"I'm not saying that you started this more for love of fight than for love of your father," he said. "But I will say that this crew is signed on to work, not to be experimented upon for the benefit of doctors and hospitals. Now, I want no more of it. Get aft, the lot of you, and the mates will pick watches. And remember, if there's any more trouble I'll keep all hands up in their watches below until they get tame!"

WATCHES were picked, and the routine of shipboard set in. But the last state of the ex-cook was worse than the first. For now the second mate—who, having the last pick, had been compelled to take him in his watch—rode him for a no-sailor, smothered him in dirty work, and harried him for fun. The hard life of the sailing ships made hard men. Epictetus, who was in the mate's watch, could do little to protect his father. For Epictetus was on deck when the watch below experimented in persecution—he could neither leave the wheel or his job to see to his father's comfort in the forecastle.

Finally the cook could stand it no longer. One quiet night he left his bunk and went to where Epictetus reclined against a coil of rope with a more or less meditative pipe.

"Epictetus," he began brokenly, "I can't stand any more of this. I'd rather be dead and in hell. I'm going to jump overboard and drown myself!"

Epictetus, who was physically incapable of understanding such a state of nerves and inability to protect oneself, spoke gruffly.

"Don't be a damned fool!"

"You don't know what it means," moaned the cook. "I'll jump over the side—unless I can find a place to hide. Where can I hide on a ship so that nobody can find me?"

Epictetus grinned, as would any sailor, at this extraordinary question.

"No place a man can hide. But," he added reminiscently, "I had a monkey once in a ship where the Old Man hated monkeys. So I hid it in the fore peak. But they found it in the end."

The ex-cook was a nervous man, but he had more nimble wits than Epictetus. A wonderful idea came to him.

"I'm going to jump overboard and hide afterward!" he announced.

Epictetus leaned forward and shook him gently.

"You're crazy," he said briefly.

"I'm not," said the cook animatedly. "Listen! I'll scream in the middle of the night. Then I'll throw something overboard that will make a splash. You'll be

at the wheel, and you can shout 'Man overboard,' and while all hands is yelling and backing the yards I'll hide down the fore peak. After that you can pass food down to me—I ain't a big eater—or I can creep out at night and steal it. When we get to New York I can slip on shore!"

"Crazy," Epictetus said, laughing, "It can't be done, even if I was fool enough to help you. You might make them think you was over the side and drowned, but you couldn't live down in the fore peak, because the hatch is kept on and you'd smother; and you can't steal food—unless you can get into the steward's pantry or the lazarette, and that's too hard for an ordinary thief. You can't steal any of the men's allowance, you know!" Epictetus concluded sternly, alluding to the greatest of shipboard sins.

"I won't. I'm a better thief than you think I am," said the ex-cook. "And you can take the hatch off the fore peak enough to give me air."

Epictetus shook his head.

"If a bit of wind comes that can't be done," he said. "The water coming over the bows would fill the fore peak, and then there would be hell."

"Maybe in bad weather I could find some other place," suggested the ex-cook hopefully.

"The captain's cabin, I suppose," grinned Epictetus. "Nice and warm in there, too!"

"Well, I'm going to do it, anyhow," exclaimed the ex-cook with unusual determination, "whether you help me or not."

"The hell!" said Epictetus with some admiration. "Oh, say, what did you do ashore that you had to run? Tell me right, now, no fooling!"

"You'll never tell anybody?"

"I'll kiss the Book I won't!"

So the ex-cook told. Epictetus laughed, but he never revealed the secret.

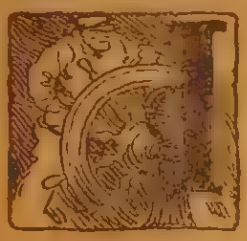
"And I'm going overboard in an hour," said the ex-cook.

"Go and turn in," advised Epictetus. "It's your watch below. It's my wheel in half an hour."

"That's why I'm going overboard to drown when I am—when you're at the wheel," said the ex-cook emphatically.

The sailor's sometimes inhuman delight in skylarking was exceedingly well developed in Epictetus. He forgot the accessories. He forgot the fore peak hatch. He forgot the food. He forgot everything except a delightful vision of the watch below being roused on deck—a watch for whom he had no affection—and of all hands working frantically to save an imagined drowning man, while all he would have to do would be to twist the spokes of the wheel occasionally. He answered the ex-cook with the utmost kindness.

"Go ahead and drown yourself," he said.



IT WAS the middle watch and a fine night, with the *Halcyon* making about five knots an hour on a wind. Epictetus took the wheel at two o'clock, as happy as a boy going to a circus. The lookout was relieved, the mate walked the weather side of the poop, and the ship grew quiet as the watch on deck found soft planks. It was very dark. Suddenly the quiet was broken by a ghastly howl.

"Good-by! Cruel world, good-by!" Followed by a tremendous splash.

It was done so naturally—not to say dramatically—that even Epictetus joined in the cry, "Man overboard!"

So naturally was it done that Epictetus, obeying the order to "keep her up in the wind" wondered if his father had not, after all, committed suicide.

"I think it was the handle of the deck pump," he muttered. "But I can find out at eight bells."

Meanwhile the ship was seething with well-directed activity.

"See anything of the man?" the captain, who had rushed on deck, demanded of a hand sent to the mizzen top.

"Not a sign, sir," shouted the sailor. "I think I saw the life buoy the mate threw over a minute ago, but nothing of a man near it."

"It was the pump handle," thought Epictetus, relieved.

They brought the ship back and close alongside the floating buoy. But not a sign of the man overboard, and by this time it had been established that the ex-cook was the victim. The captain called the hands together.

"You may put a boat over if you wish, men," he said gravely. "But we're right alongside the life buoy, and there's no sign of the poor fellow. Anybody see him fall?"

No man had seen the ex-cook go overboard. An old sailor, named Evans, spoke up in answer to the captain.

"We can all see the buoy alongside, sir, and no man anywhere near it. He must have sunk like a piece of iron——"

"He did," thought Epictetus Jones.

"—and it ain't no use getting the boat over, sir. The man in the mizzen top can see farther than we could in the boat, and he sees nothing. I guess the poor little feller's gone, sir."

"I'm afraid so," said the captain sadly. "Poor little chap, he wasn't used to ships, and likely got up on the rail for something and slipped."

"But he shouted 'good-by,' or something, sir," said the mate.

"Let's forget that part of it," said the old man. "It's kinder."

The hush and solemnity of death settled upon the *Halcyon*, the men who had bullied the ex-cook overwhelmed with honest remorse. They filled the yards again and changed watches. Epictetus was relieved and went forward to investigate. It was the pump handle. The other men spoke softly and regarded him with extreme sympathy. Epictetus was enjoying himself.

"He scared me, though," mused the big man. He saw the fore peak hatch was off, and knew where his father lay hidden. "He's all right for tonight, anyway."

But he went to his bunk with a dawning realization of the trouble likely to be in store. He had some difficulty stifling his chuckles as he lay in his bunk smoking a final pipe.

The trouble began next morning. The fore peak was the storehouse, below decks, for rope, paint and boatswain's gear. Needing new rope for a main royal brace, the second mate went forward. He found the fore peak hatch off and swore. But as he might have left it that way himself, he made no outcry. He went down the ladder into the dark recesses of the place, armed with a lantern. Presently he came up again with the rope. He carefully replaced the hatch and went aft to the steward.

"Let me have the rat trap, Steward," he said. "I heard a rat down in the fore peak. Put a hunk of cheese in it."

The steward produced the trap, duly baited. Rats are never poisoned on board ship, as they would only die below and become unpleasant. Instead, a large wire cage trap is used, and the captured rats furnish amusement for the sailors. The second mate carried the trap forward and deposited it down in the fore peak where he thought it would do most good. But he had no idea of the good it would do. The drowned man was very hungry. He had had no opportunity to steal anything. An hour later the second mate investigated the trap. He found the cheese gone, but no rat.

"That's a clever rat," he mused, and he went on deck again, intending to get more cheese and secure it with twine so the rat could not take it without getting caught.

As he merged from below he ran into Epictetus, who hastily concealed a ship's biscuit which, had he arrived five seconds earlier, he would have thrown down the fore peak, probably hitting the second mate

"There's a hell of a rat down there, Jones," said the second mate.

"A—a what, sir?" asked Epictetus, startled.

"A rat. A darned clever old bird, too. Took the cheese out of the trap and never got caught. But he won't do it again."

"What are you going to bait it with now, sir?" asked Epictetus, a trifle anxiously.

"What do you think?" asked the second mate.

"Bread might be good. It goes well with cheese, sir," answered Epictetus absently.

"Bread! Say, Jones, you must think that's a pet rat I have down there!"

"I thought the bread might tempt him, sir," stammered Epictetus.

"Tempt! That rat doesn't need tempting. He's an old, tough bird, I tell you, and dangerous. If we don't get him, and he gets real hungry, he's liable to come out at nights and eat anything he can get. I've seen sleeping sailors bitten by rats, and they got bad blood poisoning—so have you."

"Yes, sir, I have," answered Epictetus truly. "But this may not be that sort of a rat, sir—not a man-eating rat, I mean!"

"Oh, see," said the second mate sarcastically. "I suppose you would suggest I bait the trap with pea soup, eh?"

"He might—it might entice him into the trap, sir." Epictetus was a bit rattled. "You can never tell, sir!"

"And a spoon for him to eat it with, eh?"

"No, no, sir, he wouldn't need a spoon," said Epictetus.

"No, he won't—because he won't get soup," laughed the second mate. "Cheese is the best rat food. And I'll fix the next piece so no rat on earth can get it without springing the trap."

He did this to the best of his ability. He looked at the trap in an hour or so. The cheese was still there, as the drowned man had had enough cheese. But in the first dog watch, when the second mate again in-

vestigated, the cheese was missing. He went aft and annoyed the captain by asking that gentleman if he had a book in his cabin which told about the habits of rats.

THAT night a cake the steward had prepared for the captain's special use was taken from the pantry, leaving no clue. The steward did say, though, that lying half asleep he had heard heavy breathing. The second mate of course blamed the rat, and carefully battened down the fore peak hatch so the rat would be kept prisoner until he could discover a way of catching it.

The next night the second mate roused the poor steward roughly out of bed. The officers' midnight supper, always laid out at the end of the cabin table, was missing. Why didn't the steward remember his duty? In vain the steward protested that he had laid out a specially nice supper. The second mate would not believe him, and he would not believe the rat had done it, because there were no crumbs scattered around.

"But," he stormed, "some fellow is doing this for spite. I battened down the fore peak hatch and now it's off again. There's a man aboard this ship that likes rats better than he does me! But I'll get him!"

The next night the steward carefully locked up all food, asking the second mate to wake him at midnight, when he would arise and get the supper. It was one of those peculiar nights known only to the sea—a meteorological freak. A ghastly night. A night that got under the skins of sailors and fed their superstitions.

There was no wind. It was very dark, muggily warm, the atmosphere full of electricity; making men uneasy, uncomfortable. Pale and seemingly slow flashes of lightning came suddenly out of the dark from nowhere, making the ship loom like the spectral ornament of a deserted cemetery. Corpse lights—balls of electric fire of the size and shape of skulls—floated along the yards. Men shivered and prayed for wind. They spoke in whispers. Expecting sudden and perhaps dangerous wind from any quarter, the sails had mostly been clewed up, which caused a weird, skeleton effect when the lightning came.

The drowned man crept from his lair—Epictetus having removed the fore peak hatch at some risk to himself. Along the dark bulwarks the hungry one made his way stealthily. He reached the cabin alleyway and slipped in. But nowhere could he find food. He could smell food, but this only made things worse. Finally his bare toes stubbed against the medicine chest, lashed to the mizzenmast near the cabin table. Not knowing the ways of ships, the drowned man hoped for a food locker and raised the lid of the chest.

He found only bottles and bandages. He fingered the bottles, and smelled castor oil. He groaned silently. Then his eager fingers clutched on another bottle. It was the sacred medicine chest bottle of brandy, kept for accidents, to touch which is sacrilege. But the cook did not know that. He did know that he was hungry and weak, and he knew brandy when he smelled it. He took a large drink. He found it grateful and comforting. He took another drink, and felt as strong and brave as Epictetus himself. But he did not want to be caught, and left the cabin quietly.

Going forward to enjoy himself in the fore peak, he saw the watch coming aft. He could not get past them. With nowhere else to turn, he slipped up the main rigging—the darkness hiding him. Normally, wild horses could not have coaxed him up the rigging; but the brandy was more powerful.

IN THE main top—a small platform about forty feet above the deck which spreads the topmast rigging—the ex-cook rested, panting heavily. He relieved himself with another drink, and felt very sociable. He wanted to talk to someone, to share his good feelings with friends. There was still some brandy left in the bottle. And who better than Epictetus, who was no teetotaler. The brandy had stolen the drowned man's caution. He opened his mouth to call Epictetus. He told himself that he must not call too loud or the other men would hear him! He opened his mouth, but a fearful peal of thunder drowned what came out of it.

Startled, the ex-cook dropped the bottle. It fell, with an awful noise, in the quiet following the thunder. Men shivered and clutched at one another as the glass scattered with a sound like men's bones breaking. And then, to raise the horror of the night beyond human ability to endure, a

thin voice swept the silent ship.

"Epictetus! Epictetus!"

There was no answer. The crew was stricken dumb with fear.

And then—meaning but to identify himself to his son—the drowned man, trying to whisper, moaned corroboration of the sailors' dread.

"Epictetus! Epictetus, I am your father's ghost!"

He was answered by shrieks of dismay from certain of the sailors, who actually groveled on the deck.

"Answer it. Answer it, Jones," trembled the usually tough second mate, who, recollecting that he was an officer and a gentleman, strove to keep his head.

Epictetus could not obey, for two reasons. The first was that he had never spoken to a ghost, and he did not know how; the second that he daren't open his mouth because he knew he would laugh. His laughter would have been mistaken for hysteria—so far was the crew from laughter—but Epictetus did not know this.

"Speak to it," repeated the second mate manfully.

The captain saved the situation.

"No ghost's going to run my ship," he declared loudly, but without assurance.

"Epictetus, Epictetus, where are you?" wailed the ghost.

"I'll shoot the beast," exclaimed the captain, taking a wavering aim in the general direction of the main top.

"No, no, sir, you mustn't!" Epictetus grasped the captain by his pistol arm.

"Why not?" demanded the captain, stiffened by the touch of real flesh and bone.

"It's unlucky, sir," stammered Epictetus. "Yes, sir, that's what it is. No good ever came of shooting a ghost, sir."

"That's right," came the unhappy chorus of the crew.

A great flash of lightning lighted the spectral scene. It showed to the horrified sailors a replica of the dead ex-cook clinging precariously to the main backstay—clinging, apparently, to nothing, after the manner of ghosts. But it showed Epictetus something else. He saw that his father was falling, and leaped to a feat that, while it has been done, has been done seldom. The cook fell through a deluge of thunder, and Epictetus caught him just before he would have broken himself on the deck.

All the world went dark for Epictetus Jones. He became aware of things, of lying on the main hatch, gently tended.

"Get that bottle of brandy out of the medicine chest, Steward, and hurry!" he heard the captain order, and decided that catching ghosts was a worth while occupation—not knowing what had happened to the cherished brandy.

"I've only heard of that being done once before," exclaimed the captain. "I'll forgive this man for hiding his father on us." The tone of the captain's voice became both admiring and affectionate. "I'd forgive him anything—the darned old son-of-a-gun!"

And then Epictetus heard the voice of his father, as one who speaks through an alcoholic fog yet desires to be understood.

"No, not shon-of-a-gunish—no, no. He's darned old son of a sea cook!"

Dynamite Drury in Action!

A Tale of the Rhodesian Veld

WHITEWASH

A Complete Novelette

by

L. PATRICK GREENE

In the next issue of FRONTIER STORIES

NO QUARTER

By WILLIAM CRUMP RUSH

"In days of old, when knights were bold"—they did not have to crouch unprotected behind a meager patch of prickly pear and face a storm of well aimed lead.

ZEE CARTER was six foot one in his socks and weighed a hundred and eighty pounds. With an acre or two of shirt showing between his short vest and his belt, and his sleeves half way to his elbows, he looked as if he had just jumped out of a comic strip. In a dress suit he would have been a panic in a roomful of particular women, for he was handsome and didn't know it. There was not a chance that Zee ever would put on a dress suit. He was just a top hand on the Y Bar ranch, down in the cactus country. Still, women have a way of knowing how a man would look in a dress suit, whether he ever wears one or not—but that was another matter.

This young giant was the most timid man in the world in the presence of women, and the best natured fellow alive around menfolks. Just one time in all his twenty-six years had he reared up and said "No!" good and loud. That was when he got old enough to realize what his parents had done to him in the matter of a name. He wasn't a Greek philosopher, or any other kind of a philosopher. They had named the poor boy Zeno, and to make the crime stick had given him no other name. He changed it to Zee, and for fear someone would ask what the "Z" stood for he always wrote it Z-e-e, Zee. As soon as he could decently leave home he drifted to Texas and became a cow-prodder, in the hope of living down his name.

Like any other honest puncher in that wild and unpeopled country, Zee had a side partner. His name was Gid Stewart. Gid wasn't six foot, and, as one of the ranch hands said, he would have looked like "Old man Satan M. Hell, no matter what he wore." The more clothes he put on, the worse he looked. His hair was subdued carrot in color. His face was blotched with freckles and painful to look at, except for his happy blue eyes. His legs looked as if they had been tied around a barrel and left to dry that way. Gid's outstanding characteristic was near-worship for Zee Carter, and a determination to keep anyone from finding it out. The result was that the partners quarreled incessantly, to the amusement of the rest of the outfit.

It was August, and there had been no rain since the spring roundup. The whole world was crackling, singeing hot. Having eaten the noon meal, the hands were loafing in the bunkhouse, waiting for it to get a little cooler before they rode out to the range.

"I reck'n them old chaps hist'ry tells about were the bravest men that ever lived on earth," opined Zee, as he dropped a

dog-eared book and rolled a smoke. It was a book that he never tired of reading —when he wasn't looking at pictures of knights in armor, moats, draw-bridges and the like.

"Huh! Looks to me like them fellows had a cinch," growled Gid, contrary as usual. "They didn't pack nothin' but a sharp stick and a butcher knife. A feller had to ketch one of them before he could kill him. All a rider needed to be brave in them times was a little better braunk or a better pair of laigs than the other fellow had. Then he could lope up and look the other gent over. If he wasn't too rough, he could kill him, take his braunk and chawin' tobacco and look for another one. If the gent looked like Sam Bass—or some other real bad hombre—he could just let his braunk get skeered or overwork his laigs a little while, and he'd be safe. It was a whole lot different from here in this chaparral, where the other fellow can squat behind a pear thicket and pump you so full of lead you wobble before you ever even see him. Why——"

"Hey! Wait a minute!" yelled Zee. "You ain't got no appointment to just plumb preach here today, have you? Let me talk some. When them old-timers fit, they fit to a final deecision. When the fight was over they wasn't but one of 'em left. He taken both braunks and saddles and went on about his business. "Thout no modern weepons, they just taken their fighting dry so. Yelled, 'No Quarter!' and hopped to it."

"Yeah! No quarter! Who wants a quarter? I'd as soon be plumb bust and be done with it, as to have only but two bits. You listen to sense a minute. When one of them knight boys is riding the range and jumps three of a kind, or two pair, or something, what does he do? Why, he throws the leather to his braunk, lopes acrost a bridge, pulls the string, and there he is, safe in his hole and the hole pulled in after him. Old Scratch couldn't get him in a week with a new crowbar. What happens to a pore, lone Y Bar puncher, if he get's acrost the range line and rides onter four-five Dimunt L cutthroats hazin' a bunch of Y Bar stuff to market? What happens then?"

"Huh! 'Pends on who the pore, lone puncher happens to be. Now me——"

"Yeah! A brave man like you, that takes book lessons from the Knight boys, might do right smart, but me, now—suppose I bucks a deal like that. If I see 'em in time to turn and run, do I make it to ary castle? Not me. I make it to the ranch, 'bandons my braunk and crawls under the bunk shacks. Up comes them Dimunt L rustlers, shoots my braunk, sets the shack afire, and where am I? Pretty hot, ain't it?"

A roar of laughter followed this. The thought of Gid Stewart, or Zee Carter either, running from anything on earth was hilariously funny. They all knew that if Gid met the devil carrying a pot of blazing pitch, he'd roll a smoke and say, "Gimme a light, Podner!"

THE Y Bar was in the cactus country, on the lower Rio Grande. Not "pincushion" cactus, in a bowl for show purposes, but every kind of cactus known to the world, and some uncataloged varieties. Prickly pear higher than the head of a mounted man, Spanish Daggers that would have made fair lances for "the Knight boys," and every thorny bush known to botany.

Old Gabe Young had located the Y Bar in that country because he didn't want to be crowded and because he knew the value of "tallow weed" range. He never had been crowded until now, and the ranch that was crowding him was thirty miles away. Gabe Young had known from the first that there was something wrong with the Diamond L outfit, but he worked cattle with them the first year. Also, the handsome foreman of the Diamond L, Dave Wait, was often a visitor at the Y Bar ranch-house.

About the time he discovered that the Diamond L outfit was a gang of rustlers and severed friendly relations with them, Old Man Gabe discovered something else. He could, and did, break off relations with the Diamond L by the simple statement to Waite that he knew they were a gang of damned rustlers and he'd shoot the next Diamond L man he found on his range. That was easy. All he had to do was to tell his men to back up his edict, but severing relations between the handsome Dave Waite and Gabe's equally handsome daughter, and only child, Jenny Young, was another matter.

With due regard for his handsome person, Dave Waite stayed away from the Y Bar, but twice a week, rain, shine, storm or tempest, Jenny rode to Palo Alto. It was fifteen miles south of the Y Bar ranch-house, and twenty from the Dia-

mond L. There was nothing there but a little store and postoffice. It stood on a round knob that was covered with live-oak timber. Hence the name. American punchers called it Timber Hill. Old Man Gabe knew Jenny got letters from Dave Waite, and he was morally certain that she sometimes met Waite at the little store.

All he could do was curse, and tell himself he'd have to kill Dave Waite. Jenny was a girl that couldn't be talked to. Mrs. Young, who worshipped her and relied on her for company there on the lonely ranch, could never deny her anything. Rough old Gabe just gave her all the money she wanted and kept out of it.

"What's the matter with Jenny?" he speculated. "Has she gone clean crazy? Why don't she marry some decent puncher and have it over with?"

"Oh, Gabe!" replied his wife, "you're so rough. Jenny is just like any other young girl. She wants men company. Might be some of our boys she'd like, but they wouldn't never offer to keep her company. If you make such a fuss about the foreman of a big ranch paying attention to her, they'd expect you to shoot a common hand if he even looked at her."

"Oh, they would?"

"Yes, they would. Everybody thinks you picked that quarrel with the Diamond L just to stop Dave from coming here, and ——"

"Oh, they do? Well, now you listen to me, Letty. I ain't got nothin' ag'in' any honest man that Jenny wants, but I don't aim for my daughter to tie up with a thief. I want you to talk to Jenny. She's gone to Palo Alto today, hot as it is, and——"

"You talk to her, Gabe. You're the one that wants——"

In order to keep from swearing in the presence of his wife, which was the one concession that Old Man Gabe made to the conventions, he stepped out the door, passed through the grove of big mesquites in the yard, through the gate in the palisade fence, and trundled his spurs along the sun-cooked trail that led to the bunkhouse. He was so mad the smoke was coming out of his ears and eyes, and he hoped to find a diversion.

In the bunk shack the boys were laughing at the quarrel between Zee and Gid, but another diversion was coming. It came tearing through the pear thickets, looking back from time to time, as if a whole battalion of demons were after it. This diversion was nothing more than old Simone, a Mexican vaquero. His horse slid to a stop, and he fairly fell into the bunkhouse door.

"Hey! What's the matter with you, Simone!" yelled Gid Stewart. "Bustin' in 'thout knockin' thataway. Might been ladies present."

As a matter of fact, Simone hadn't intended to enter the house. Social lines on the Y Bar were very closely drawn. The Mexican hands lived with their families in a little village of *jacales* a quarter of a mile from the ranch-house.

"*Mucho fuego,* señores!" sputtered the Mexican, when he caught his breath.

"What's that!" roared Old Man Gabe, who came up just as Simone's fuse quit sputtering and he went off.

"*No quiera Dios! El rancho se quema,* señor!"

"The ranch is burning? What do you mean? Spit it out before you choke!"

AT THAT a flood of Spanish escaped Simone to the effect that ten or twelve miles to the southwest the Y Bar range was burning. He had seen men setting it. He had gone to them. They had shot at him. Blood dripping from the fingers of his right hand and a bullet hole in the sleeve of his shirt corroborated his story. Asked who was setting the fire, he said he saw only two of them, and they were Diamond L punchers.

Before Simone had finished his story, Old Man Gabe had whipped out his knife and cut away the Mexican's shirt sleeve, exposing a bleeding flesh wound just above the elbow.

"Go to the house, Simone, and let Mrs. Young doctor that arm," said Old Man Gabe, his voice suddenly gone soft and low and humming like a tight wire.

That was his way. He blustered and roared about a pair of lost hobbles, but became a silent, seething volcano before a real eruption.

By the time Simone had finished his story, the men had come tumbling out of the bunkhouse. Inside of five minutes, with Old Man Gabe at their head, they were tearing through the pear thickets toward the fire. In all civilized countries arson has long been considered a crime in the class with murder. Firing a man's range, at a time like that, was arson of the worst sort. Dry as it was, with that strong, hot wind blowing from the southwest, the fire would soon sweep the best part of

Young's range and leave his cattle to die.

Fighting fire in open prairie, or even in timber, is possible of success. Fighting fire in pear thickets just can't be done. According to Simone's story, the fire had been started in open country about a mile from the chaparral. If they could reach it before it struck the cactus, there was hope; if not, there was none. So on they rode at top speed, in spite of the heat. Half-way to the fire the speed and the heat were beginning to tell on their mounts. Already some were dropping behind. In the lead were Old Man Gabe, Zee and Gid.

Before they reached the fire they realized it was too late. Suddenly the red smoke of the prairie fire changed to the thick, steamy pall of the chaparral. From such glimpses as they could get through the smoke, they knew that the fire had been set well to the west and carried in a line due south.

"Aim to burn me clean out, I reck'n," said Old Man Gabe, in soft, vibrant tones, as he stopped and waited for the others to come up. "All right. We'll go talk to 'em about it."

The others came up and stopped, their horses heaving from running in the choking heat and smoke-filled air.

"Boys," said Gabe, sweetly, "I reck'n we got to clean up that Diamond L outfit. We'll just turn south, go to the end of the fire, and see what we can find. The Mexicans will keep it away from the house and the pens. Don't crowd your horses too much, or some of you'll be afoot."

Keeping back from the smoke cloud, they rode steadily south for two miles, until they came to the worn trail that led to Palo Alto. Just as they reached the trail a stocking-footed roan came storming along, the stirrups of the empty saddle flapping the bushes by the trail and the pony's scorched mane waving in the wind.

"Good God!" cried Young. "There's Jenny's mount coming from Palo Alto."

He had barely finished speaking when Zee whirled into the trail, with Gid at his heels, and stormed straight into the fire, which was burning across the trail.

"Come back, you damned fools!" shouted old Gabe. "You'll be burned to death!" but his voice merely bounded back from the wall of smoke and heat. Zee and Gid were gone, right into the heart of the inferno, and the frightened roan had turned and followed them.

"Oh, hell!" said old Gabe, as if he were about to cry. "Four of you fellows go back to the ranch and direct the Mexicans. Fire against this, and try to save a little patch of grass for the saddle stock. The rest of us will go on."

WHEN Zee and Gid broke through the wall of smoke and flame, they came out gasping for breath, their eyes filled with tears, and their clothing on fire in a dozen places. A mile farther across the black, desolate, burned over ground they came to where the fire was burning slowly back against the wind. Just beyond the fire stood Jenny Young, waving desperately at them. They passed through the slight fire and gulped a few breaths of fresh air.

"Why, why—how'd yo' braunk get away, Miss Jenny?" Zee asked, bashfully. "Ain't hurt, are you?"

"No, I'm not hurt, but——"

"Better mount and go back to the store. We're in a hurry and you can't get home through this."

"I—I don't want to go back to the store. I want to go with you."

"But it's going to be rough where we're goin'."

"I don't care; I'm going with you."

"Well'm, I reck'n you're the boss."

As they thundered along the open prairie, following the backfire steadily south, the way the firebugs had gone, Zee was wondering. How the blazes did that roan get away from Jenny? She could ride anything on the ranch. She wasn't hurt. There was no indication that she had been thrown. Why wouldn't she go back to the store, instead of following them into the middle of hell? They rounded a grove of mesquite trees and pear, and saw ten men coming from the head of the fire and still half a mile away.

"That can't be Old Man Gabe and them," Zee muttered, as they pulled up.

"Hell, no!" replied the keen-eyed Gid. "Thats' Dimunt L riders. Wonder where they're goin'."

"Comin' for us," replied Zee, grimly.

It was too late to turn and run for the little grove they had just passed. Anyway, they couldn't have gotten into it, for it was grown up with pear and chaparral. Between them and the oncoming horsemen was a deep arroyo. The race was now for it, and the three had the advantage. They rode down into the ravine while the Diamond L men were yet two hundred yards away but already firing at them. In the bottom of the ravine they sprang from

their horses. Zee helped Jenny from her stocking-footed roan.

"Sit down on the ground, right against the bank, Miss Jenny, and stay there no matter what happens," he rapped out.

There was no time for formalities. The partners had jerked their carbines from their saddles as they dismounted, and now they turned to the bitter business in hand. They didn't know just why the Diamond L boys had opened on them, but they had, and there was no time to ask questions. They were less than a hundred yards from the ravine when Zee's rifle spat viciously, and the foremost one of the gang pitched from his horse, while the others slid to a stop and gave back a bit.

"Fire on a woman, would you?" grated Zee, as he threw another cartridge into the barrel. "Get meat when you shoot, Gid. They won't give us time to reload."

As a matter of fact, the Diamond L men had been unable to tell that there was a woman with the partners, but it would have made little difference. The fight was on. Shoulder to shoulder, under the bank with nothing but a little cluster of pear at the top to shield them when they crept up to shoot, Zee and Gid faced the odds of five to one. Gid got one, and the odds were reduced to four to one, but the Diamond L men had no notion of quitting the fight. They merely drew back a little and substituted rifles for six-shooters. They were trying to cover their tracks. They thought they had gotten old Simone. and now they were going to kill these three so that no charge of firing the Y Bar range could be sustained against them. There was little law in the cactus country, but there was enough, and of a very sudden and dangerous kind, to make short work of range burners if the charge was proved on them. As Zee raised up to fire, a perfect hail of bullets swept across the ravine. Gid heard a soft thud and and saw a bullet hole in the lower part of Zee's right shoulder. Zee didn't even flinch, but kept his gun working until another horseman slid from his saddle.

"Some of that no two-bits stuff," growled Gid, as cartridges clicked through the loading gate of his carbine. "Look out! They'll get you if you stand up that way!"

Too late! Zee was standing up, with half of his body exposed, and two more of the attackers went down under his level shooting. Then a bullet cut across the top of his right hip; his leg went numb, and, falling, he rolled to the bottom of the *resaca*. With a yell, the remaining six swept forward to the final charge.

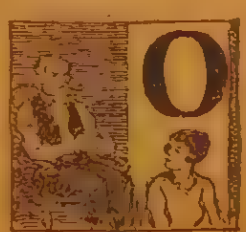
"Come on, and go with me," chortled Gid Stewart, as he laid his gun to the cheek and at short range toppled two from their horses. But the end was near. The four were sending a storm of lead over and through the little gulch of pear and tearing loose the dirt on the other side of the ravine. Suddenly the attackers were swept by a flank attack. Old Gabe Young and his men had torn through the fire when they heard the first shots. Another minute, and those ten would never fire another range. Old Man Gabe rode up and peered down into the deep ravine.

"Thank God!" he cried. "There's Jenny, but——"

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy! Do something, quick! He's—he's——"

The last thing Zee knew, his head was resting on a funny sort of pillow. It was Jenny Young's lap. It seemed to him that it had been but about five minutes when he woke again, but things were not right. He was in a bed, and he had whiskers all over his face. He tried to raise his hand, and it wouldn't come up. He looked around and decided that he wasn't in the bunkhouse. Where the devil was everybody? He wanted to know some things. Was the range all burned? Did they lose any cattle, and—oh, a lot of things. He tried to call and found that his voice wasn't working. So he shut his eyes and went to sleep again.

Zee had no knowledge of Old Man Gabe and the boys bringing him to the Y Bar, across the black, smoking, choking, burned range, thinking they would bury him when they got him there. He didn't know that Gid had killed a good horse getting a doctor to the ranch, and had almost killed the doctor for not hurrying beyond human endurance. There was also another little matter—in fact, the thing that had caused all the trouble, that Zee didn't know a thing about.



ONE evening, after the doctor had said that Zee would live, old Gabe Young and his daughter were sitting on the gallery at the old 'dobe ranch-house while Gid took a turn at the bedside. Old Man Gabe was smoking. and there was a deep wrinkle between his eyes. Finally he turned to Jenny.

"How come you to be afoot that day of the fire, Jenny?" he asked.

"Daddy, I've been wanting to tell you about it, but I've been afraid to."

"Afraid? What are you afraid of?"

"You."

"Huh! First time I ever heard you being afraid of me. Must be something wrong about that."

"Yes, there was a whole lot wrong about it, but I didn't think so at the time. I was the cause of all the trouble."

"How come?"

"I kept writing to Dave Waite and meeting him at Palo Alto, when I knew you didn't want me to meet him. Then that day he—he wanted me to run away and marry him, and——"

"Why didn't you do it?"

"Daddy! You didn't want me to, did you?"

"Oh, no. I'd have hunted him up and shot him, if you had. I was just wondering why you didn't."

"Why, it was because I never did care anything about Dave Waite. I didn't believe he was crooked, then, but I just didn't care for him like a woman cares for a man she marries. I was just trying to—trying to—you understand."

"Sure, I understand, perfectly, I don't reckon. But the point is, what was you doing afoot that day?"

"Well, when Dave Waite got insistent and ugly, he accused me of encouraging him, and I got mad and said some things to him. After that I went into the store. While I was in there Dave and his men turned Stockings loose and threw a scare into him that they thought would last him until he got to the Y Bar. The last thing Dave said to me was, 'Your pap thinks my outfit's bad. All right, we'll give him something to make him keep on thinking it.' I didn't have any idea what he meant, then. I couldn't get a horse at Palo Alto, so I started on to the ranch on foot, thinking I'd find Stockings grazing along the trail somewhere. When I saw the fire I knew they were burning you out, and I—I cried. I could see, then, where I had done wrong, and—and—" Jenny choked up and hung her head in shame.

"That's all right, Jenny," soothed old Gabe. "It had to come sometime, and we got out of it pretty cheap. In fact, I'm a whole lot ahead of the game, account of something I learned."

"Cheap, *cheap!* Oh, Daddy, how can you say that, when—when—" And with a sob, Jenny rose and went into the house."

"Now what the hell have I done?" muttered old Gabe, to himself. "She said she didn't care anything about Dave Waite. I don't make any difference if she does, now, for the Diamond L outfit won't never bother anybody again. A woman is a damneder curiosity than one of these here newfangled phonygrafts."

WHEN Zee Carter woke again things looked better, and he felt better. Mrs. Young fed him some broth, and he went to sleep again. Came a day when he could eat a man-size meal of beef and biscuits. Then he rolled a smoke as he sat up in bed, and Old Man Gabe came in to talk to him.

"Well, you decided to stay on this side of the divide a while longer, did you?" greeted Young.

"Looks like it. Mighty glad you came in. Lot of things I've been wanting to know. Did the range all burn? What did you do with the cattle?"

"Well, son, the range in this cactus country is curiouser than a woman or an alarm clock, and they are two of the most onnatural and ondependable fool things in the world. The night after the fire we had the dangedest rain that has fell in this country in the twenty year that I been ranching here, and what do you suppose happens?"

"Ground was so hot that the grass was knee high by next morning?" grinned Zee.

"Worse'n that. I learned something that I'd orter knowed all them twenty years. The fire burned the stickers all off'n the pear, and the rain washed 'em clean. I just knowed we had to move to grass, for all the range we had left was about a section here around the ranch-house that the Mexicans saved. In a day or two we started out to gather and drive, and dang my hide if the cattle wasn't eating them singed pear. They kept on eating them, and now they're seal fat. First time I ever knowed what Godamighty made the stuff for. The grass came all right, and lots of tallow weed. Winter range is going to be better than for years. I'm feeling fine. Di'mond L gone, this discovery made, you getting well, and everything to the good."

They talked on a while, and then Old Man Gabe went on about his business. It was late afternoon when the old man returned to the ranch-house. He hung his belt and gun on the bed post, as usual, then

crept softly to the door of Zee's room. If the boy was still asleep, he didn't want to wake him. The door stood partly open, and old Gabe heard voices coming from the room. He peered in and saw Jenny sitting by the bedside. She was leaning over, with her head on Zee's breast, and he was stroking her hair with one of his white hands.

"But, honey, I knew all the time you loved me, and you ought to have known that I loved you," she told him softly. "How could I help it?"

"I dunno, but what about Dave Waite?" asked Zee, doubtingly. "Didn't you love me none until after he was dead?"

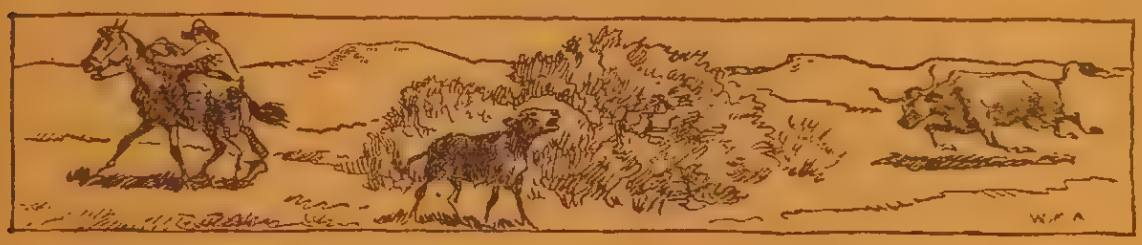
"Oh, you silly boy! I never did care anything about Dave Waite or anybody else but you. I just noticed Dave, to—to make you jealous, and it made me furious because you wouldn't be jealous."

Old Man Gabe crept silently away from the door with a broad grin on his wrinkled, leathery face.

"Well, I'll be just about half-way damned!" he muttered, when he was back in his room with the door shut. "A woman is one hell of an institution. Jenny's got right good sense, after all."

Half an hour later, when Gid crept to the door to see if his partner was still asleep, conditions hadn't changed perceptibly in the sick room. Gid peeped in, turned and walked away.

"Knowed all the time she'd get him," he growled, under his breath. "Pore feller didn't have no chance at all, and him all shotten to shoestrings thataway. Guess she's been reading about them Knight boys, and this is some more of that 'no quarter' stuff. Reck'n it ain't so bad, at that. Zee seems to like it."



THE RANGE CALF

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

A CALF is a calf until it is weaned. It is assertive around meal time, which is all day long, mischievous, playful and has a vast conceit. An hour after it is born it can walk on shaky knees and buckling forelegs nearly around its proud mother, and finds great comfort in leaning against its maternal parent for support. In appearance it is mostly legs, and wobbly legs at that. When it is five or six days old it is tough and begins to cavort a little, not always successfully, and sticks its velvety nose into business which does not always concern it.

When its mother goes off to a distant waterhole she hides it in a clump of grass or weeds, with an injunction to "stay put" until she returns; and "stay put" is one of the things the calf does to perfection. If lifted up by some curious cowboy it tries to flatten and to assume the limpness of jelly, and if annoyed too much it bawls for help. When that bawl sounds across the range the curious puncher knows just exactly what his next step should be—he hustles to his horse and he hustles *pronto*. A cow of the old Spanish strain is nothing for a man on foot to fool with when her calf calls for help. She will fight anything for it, and the calf knows it. Not only the mother is to be considered; any other mother or any bull within sound of the pleading cry is due to arrive as a rescuer and without loss of time.

This worthless, gluttonous imp of Satan is the light of its mother's life, especially if it should be her first-born. Its chief occupation is to eat until it can hold no more, and the filling shrinks amazingly fast. With the rapid growth of its muscles comes a greater radius for raising Cain, and a greater ambition, which results in many family quarrels before the calf is weaned. Branded when two or three months old, and perhaps in the shuffle lost from its mother for hours, it begins to find that life is not all joy. A week later finds it healed and well, ready to disturb the peace of the range. The next roundup finds the bumptious youth weaned and no longer a calf, but a swaggering sport of a yearling, the bane of herd life.

THREE WISE MEN OF THE NORTH

By AUGUST EBERHARDT

Author of "Sitka Red," "The Fox-Poacher," etc.

Wresting a fortune from the Northern gold fields need not at all be a back-breaking proposition, Slippery Wilson instructed his willing partners—but before he was finished he was to find that there was a lot about easy money making of which he knew nothing.

OF THE three tardy argonauts who arrived at the newly discovered gold fields of Ophir in the wake of the stampede Slippery Wilson represented the guiding genius by reason of his experience acquired through many years of sojourn in the North and also because of his proven ability to make what he called "a white man's living" under circumstances where others, less cunning than he, were forced to earn their daily flapjacks and beans by the sweat of their brows. Except for the distinction of being the only sourdough among the three, Slippery shared with his two partners most of their outstanding qualities; and principal among these a deep-rooted ambition to reap where he had not sown.

It was this same happy dream of an effortless existence that had sundered the Cockney Kid from the cruelly revolving wheels of industry and had shaped his path toward the North Star; where, he had heard, one could amass a fortune in gold by the simple expedient of stooping to pick the nuggets from the ground.

During half a lifetime, devoted mainly to the uninspiring task of polishing the decks of Uncle Sam's coast guard cutters, Dutch Henry, the third member of the trio, had nursed a secret and unsated yearning for a permanent vacation that would be unmarred by the disgusting presence of holystones or any other reminder of sordid drudgery.

Being thus eminently suited to each other by common sympathies it was only natural that, when Fate threw them together at the lonely Yukon trading post, they should join forces in their endeavor to see their dominant ambition realized.

Slippery Wilson's claim to his ability to make a white man's living under all circumstances was demonstrated when he succeeded in inducing a hard-boiled store keeper to advance the necessary grubstake to the three eager but impecunious stampeders. With an allowance of grub sufficient to last them during the eight months of winter—in exchange for their signed promise of a fourth share in all the treasure they might wrest from the frozen bosom of the earth—the happy argonauts had turned their heavily loaded poling boat

up-stream and set out gallantly upon the arduous voyage to distant Ophir.

By the time they had turned the first bend of the river their effervescent ardor had considerably subsided. While they rested the nose of their boat on shore and took a breathing spell in the shade of some cottonwood trees, Slippery Wilson grasped the occasion to dilate upon the pernicious consequences of undue haste. Their respected leader's words, emanating, as he assured them, from a store of bitterly acquired experience, struck his cheechako partners with the force of their logic. And during their further progress against the swift current of the river the part which the argonauts played in the great Ophir stampede was scarcely calculated to serve as an example of the dynamic energy of that mad rush.

Thus, when the partners beached their boat some weeks later in front of the swarming center of activities that was new-blown Ophir City, they found that all the creeks and gullies for miles around had been staked by the hurrying throng that had overtaken them on their leisurely voyage up-river. Also, they were told, no new strike of any prominence had been recorded since the event of the original discovery, which had started the rush.

This last bit of news caused a superior smile to disarrange the freckles on Slippery's cunning face.

"It seems we ain't lost nothin' so far by refusin' ter sacrifice our dignity as sensible humans an' rushin' for them diggin's like hogs for the feedin' trough. Gold is where yuh find it, yuh know," he declared in an effort to cheer up his partners, "an' I figger we've jess as good a chance ter strike pay ten miles from discovery as on the claim next to it."

It turned out that the partners had to ascend the river just about the distance indicated by Slippery before they reached the mouth of a creek that was not yet entirely preëmpted by eager goldseekers. There were some men on the ground, however, and from them the partners gathered that the creek bed contained black sand and an abundance of colors, which was a promising sign.

As there were still more prospectors expected to arrive, the partners hastened to stake out their lawful share of the ground in the valley above the locations already claimed; which brought the situation of their claim about midway up the length of the creek. The lateness of the season made it peremptory for the weary trio to start immediately upon the heartbreaking work of building their cabin.

When finally the partners threw the last shovelful of dirt upon the flat roof of the cabin, which they had built upon the center claim of the three they had staked, other stragglers had staked the remaining ground to the head of the creek and the sound of their busy ax strokes rang through the clear, frosty air of the valley from morning to night.

WITH a foot of snow covering the ground it was evident even to the Cockney Kid that the gathering in of the golden treasure demanded something more than the mere motion of stooping down. In company of Dutch Henry he set out the next morning to watch the process followed by the experienced sourdoughs whose claims were above and below his own.

It was upon this trip of investigation that the two cheechakoes realized a great many painful truths with regard to placer mining. Upon every claim they found men busily engaged stripping the surface of the ground of snow and moss. Steel steam-points were being driven in the frozen soil; the dumpy little prospecting boilers hissed clouds of steam; pipes clanked and sputtered, while in some places, where the work was considerably advanced, men were straining their backs at moaning windlasses, heaving heavy buckets of steaming soil from dark shafts.

All about them was bustle and commotion. A feverish excitement seemed to drive the busy prospectors in their arduous task. They had little time to answer the innumerable questions put to them by the two unhappy students of mining methods. However, the latter acquired enough enlightenment from their brief course of investigation to rob them forever of the happy delusion that a fortune in raw gold could be acquired by lazy methods.

It was a very discouraged pair of embryo prospectors who entered the cabin in the gloam of the early evening. Slippery Wilson, who had devoted the day to numerous successful attempts at "beating the Chinaman", looked up from his cards and greeted his crestfallen partners with a knowing smile.

"Well, did yuh see anybody diggin' up a fortune today?" he asked cheerfully.

"Fowtune?" the little Cockney exploded

with disgust fairly flashing from his beady black eyes. "Blyme if I believe there's any gowld in this 'ere valley. All we seen toke out was mud an' gravel an' never a single nugget as big as a pea!"

"Ach, I wish I had stayed by my ship!" Dutch Henry voiced his profound grief with a dolorous expression on his flappy fat cheeks. "At sea we work, too, but nefer so hart as those crazy brosbectors, I bet you!"

Slippery slowly gathered his cards, rose and stepped up to his partners, who were warming themselves by the roaring Yukon stove.

"It does seem tough ter go a-diggin' in this here frozen soil fer weeks an' perhaps months only ter find in the end that the ground doesn't contain any gold," he admitted. "Myself now, I have always been able ter live like a white man an' so far I havn't found it necessary ter dirty my hands on a muckstick. At that, I don't see that we've anything ter complain of the way we're fixed. This here stampede has already earned us a grubstake that'll last us fer the rest o' the winter. I feel that we owe it to ourselfs ter make the most o' the good luck this stampede has already brought us an' eat up that grubstake with as much comfort as the situation affords."

Slippery's plea for comfort found a ready response in his partners' passionate devotion to calm repose. Their faces lit up immediately.

"'Pon my word, yer hidea ain't arf bad," the Cockney Kid commented approvingly. "Meself, I likes me bit o' comfort afore every'thing, but—" his sly gargoyle of a face suddenly sobered while he scratched his curly black hair— "'ow are we goin' ter find out then if there's any gowld in our ground?"

Slippery completed the final touches on a cigarette in the making.

"We'll let them other fellers tend to that part of the job," he calmly assured the questioner.

"Haw-haw!" The Kid appeared to find a great deal of fun in his partner's statement. "Hi can jolly well see them fellows a-takin' pity on us, sinkin' prospect 'oles in our claims so we get more time fer playin' cards!"

The Kid's ridicule did not disturb Slippery. Calmly he bent to the tamped earth floor and picked up a piece of charcoal from in front of the stove. "Them fellers won't need to dig in our ground ter show us wether there's any gold in our claims an' whereabouts the paystreak runs, ef there is sech a thing as a paystreak in this valley.

"I'll explain this for yuh fellers," he offered as he stepped to the table, upon whose freshly hewn planks he began to draw an undulating line down the middle of the oblong plane.

"THIS line stands fer the creek we're on—Squaw Creek, as them fellows who came here first have named it," he informed his partners.

Next Slippery drew two parallel lines along the edges of the table, which, he explained, signified the benches framing the valley. Across the longitudinal lines marking the course of the creek he drew eighteen lateral lines and the rectangles thus created he marked from the bottom upward with the numbers one to seventeen.

"Now," he said, "here we got Squaw Creek as it is terday. Each o' them rectangles means a claim. Yuh see the claims marked frum one ter seven. Them is the claims that was staked afore we come here. Numbers eight, nine an' ten is our own claims. The claims marked frum 'leven ter seventeen is the ground staked by the fellers that come after us. Yuh got me so far?"

The two cheechakoes nodded understanding.

"Well then," continued their experienced leader, "yuh notice that each claim runs thirteen hundred and twenty feet across the valley frum bench to bench. Up an' down the creek each claim measures six hundred an' sixty feet. If they is a paystreak buried along that creek it'll nash'rally run in the direction o' the valley where glaciers or some eroshum, as they calls it, has left it. That paystreak, if it's there, might be as much as a hundred feet wide, an' again it might be no more broader 'n a deer trail. Likewise it may happen ter be located in the middle o' the valley, or it might run anywheres between them two benches.

"Now, always considerin' that they is sech a thing as a paystreak, yuh fellers can figger it out fer yerself that it'll take an uncommon streak o' luck fer them muckstick manip'laters that yuh been watchin' terday ter run on to it at the bottom o' one o' their first holes. Howsomever, fourteen men a-diggin' fer all they're worth are bound ter find it sooner or later. An' once they has struck it at the bottom of a

hole it'll be much easier to select the place where the next hole ought ter be sunk. With three or four shafts down to pay, they'll have a line on the paystreak; an' after that it won't be no trouble ter trace the paystreak down the length of the valley."

Slippery looked up from his improvised chart and swung a didactic finger under his partners' noses.

"Now, supposin' them busy muckstick artists above an' below our claims has traced the paystreak right down to the upper an' lower limit of our location—won't it be jess a cinch fer us lucky guys ter trace a line in the snow across our claims an' say, 'Along this line we must dig an' be sure ter strike pay at the bottom of every hole?'"

The two disciples in the art of making a white man's living had listened to the master's dissertation with ever increasing interest. Dutch Henry's satisfaction at the pleasing prospect expressed itself in a silent chuckle that caused a protracted quake in the region of his equator. His watery, pale blue eyes closed to mere slits; his round cheeks puffed out beyond the tip of his stubby little nose, while his mouth extended in a gash that threatened self-decapitation. But suddenly a thought seemd to have struck him that caused all signs of merriment to vanish from his face.

"Und ven of der baystreak der is noddings in der creek?" he inquired.

Slippery was not the least taken aback by this unexpected question. Indeed, he seemed to rise several inches in answer to the problem thus put to his genius to solve. Laying a fatherly hand upon the well-nourished shoulders of his rotund partner, he calmed the latter's fears.

"My dear Dutch, in case there's no paystreak in this valley," he replied with lofty confidence, "then we'll still have a trump card ter play that none o' them deluded muckstick artists will be able ter beat."

"So-o? How you make dot oud?"

"Listen! The news o' this here Ophir gold strike has traveled all over the United States by this time. Thousands o' people outside will want ter come here ter try their fortune. When river navigation opens in the spring this here diggin's 'll be flooded with gold-hungry cheechakoes. They'll stake every foot o' ground in the district an' them that can't find any ground ter stake will be glad ter *buy* ground."

Slippery paused to roll a cigarette, meanwhile allowing the facts of his argument to become absorbed by his partners. After leisurely sending a few artistic ringlets of smoke toward the cabin roof he continued with sublime assurance.

"We all know that cheechakoes is fond o' takin' a good deal fer granted that is told them about this wonderful country. But my business o' makin' a white man's livin' has nash'rally brought me a good deal in contact with that sort o' people an' accordin' to my observations most o' them is putty well able ter tell black from white. Now, with the claims above an' below ours all pitted with holes like the pox had gone over the ground, even a cheechako, tryin' ter buy a claim, will come ter reckon that if the men who dug them holes had found anything at the bottom they'd not offer their claims fer sale. But when they comes ter look at our ground it'll be a different thing. Here they'll see what they'll call perfectly virgin ground, not marred by a single scratch o' the pick. There's mystery an' promise in sech a plot o' unworked ground in the middle of a gold bearin' district. It'll get up their curiosity; the ground *might* hold gold, an' I'll eat my boots if one or another o' them won't buy our ground fer enough money ter pay us at least wages fer the time an' trouble we spent in locatin' an' watchin' the claims."

Slippery's ingenious scheme, as revealed to his partners, relieved the latter of the last trace of the gloom that the foreboding of work had engendered. When their enthusiasm calmed down Slippery once more produced the deck of cards.

"Come on, fellers," he invited. "Take a hand in this solo game. We have ter find out who's ter cook the supper tonight."

WITH a plentiful supply of grub in their cache, with the Yukon stove roaring merrily the three partners felt perfectly comfortable in their cozy cabin and were scarcely aware of the passing of the short days and the increasing cold of the long and dreary winter night.

Most of their time was dedicated to the important task of conserving their health and strength by a plentiful indulgence in sleep, while their waking hours were almost entirely engaged by the serious business of playing solo.

Thus the days passed for the trio in

passionless quiescence. Rarely did they wander far from their retreat, and months after their arrival some of the miners operating along Squaw Creek had never seen their faces.

One day shortly before Christmas, when the brief two hours of half-hearted daylight had once more begun to dwindle into the gloam of an Arctic afternoon, there was a knock at their cabin door which roused the partners out of their beauty sleep.

"Come in!" called Dutch Henry, whose bunk was nearest the door, and at the same time he reached out a hairy leg from under his blankets and lifted the wooden doorlatch with his big toe. Upon this two men entered. The one in the drill parka, partly covered by a great, grizzled and ice-encrusted beard, was Dad Hobson, who owned the claim just above them. In his companion they recognized Dick Tate, a younger man with an aggressive face, sporting a little black mustache. His claim joined the property of the partners on the lower limit.

The faces of the two visitors expressed some surprise when they saw the occupants of the cabin still comfortably ensconced in their bunks at a time when night was approaching.

"Howdy, boys!" greeted Tate. "Hope there ain't nothin' the matter with yore health, seein' you keep to yer bunks this time o' day."

"Thanks fer the hinquiry about our 'ealth," the Cockney reported with a long-drawn yawn, "but, as ye see, we're just in the hact o' preservin' it."

"Hm—I suppose a fire wouldn't come amiss," Tate suggested as he applied himself to the task of cutting shavings from a pile of dry spruce wood behind the stove. In a few moments he had the little tin stove roaring, and, sitting down at the table, he addressed the occupants of the cabin.

"Dad here an' I come over to see how yuh boys was gettin' along," he said. "We been noticin' yuh ain't showed up much in the open an' we thought that perhaps yuh had some good reason why yuh haven't started diggin' this far. We know that often people start out on a stampede without bein' properly outfitted to spend the winter. So Hobson an' me comes to the conclusion that if this is the case with yuh—why, we two might be able to spare some grub. Or if it's tools yuh need to work yore claims, I have no doubt we can scrape up some picks an' shovels to give yuh fellows a chance to find out what's in yore ground."

"Yuh see," Tate went on, unperturbed by the partners' apparent lack of interest, "yuh see, our idea is that if every man that owns a claim along this creek does his part in the prospectin' the sooner we all know what the ground holds. There is pay along this creek someplace; colors have been taken from every hole so far dug. As I said, each man's work helps out the rest o' the miners along the creek; so, if they is anything we can do for yuh fellows to put yuh in position to work them here claims o' yours, why, jess say so, an' there won't be a man in this valley as won't gladly help yuh along."

The partners had listened in silence. When Tate finished Slippery rose in his upper bunk, stretched himself and replied with a yawn like a dying codfish gasping for air.

"Ho-hm—thanks, boys, for yer generous offer. It's sure pleasant ter have sech kindly disposed neighbors; but the fact is the three o' us has joined ter form a sassiety fer the preservation o' the nash-ral beauties o' the ground, an' our statutes ferbid us ter mar or in any way violate the virgin surface of our holdin's, exceptin' always the case where circumstances offers the proof that sech violation of our rules is bound ter lead us smack onto the pay-streak."

With that Slippery reached for the little shelf above his bunk, from which he took the butt of a cigarette, which he lighted and began to smoke with silent relish.

For a moment after Slippery had ceased speaking the two neighbors stared at each other across the table in perplexed wonder. Then suddenly the veiled mockery of Slippery's reply seemed to grip young Tate's mind, for his handsome face turned scarlet with anger and he was about to leap from his seat in an angry retort, when his bearded partner laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"No use gittin' sore, Dick," old Dad's deep, booming voice rolled from out of his forest of whiskers.

"We see now what you fellows is after," he accused the occupants of the bunks. "Oh, yes, it's a right smart scheme," he added bitterly, "but not the sort of game that an honest sourdough would attempt."

The two visitors had risen and moved toward the door. Standing in its open frame, Dick Tate turned and shot a glance of utter contempt at the weary trio.

"Well, I wish you luck!" he snapped, as

he slammed the door behind him.

"Same to yuh, pardner," Slippery's cheerful voice rang after him.

"Now eferybody along der greek will be sore ad us afder dis," Dutch Henry remarked after their visitors had departed.

"Well, let 'em," was Slippery's unconcerned reply as he leaped from his upper bunk and donned his clothes by the warmth of the roaring stove. "What difference does it make to us? They can't take our claims from us. Them is staked an' recorded accordin' to law, an' by the same law we has a whole year's time ter do our assessment work in. Long afore that year is over we'll either know where ter dig or whether it's worth diggin' at all."

THAT Dutch Henry was not so far off the mark when he predicted that the rest of the miners would resent their shirking their share of the work in prospecting Squaw Creek, was easily perceptible in the unfriendly attitude of the workers on the rare occasions when the partners ventured beyond the bounds of their holdings. The hostile attitude did not, however, prevent the trio from gathering all the necessary information concerning the new diggings as a whole and their own creek in particular.

It appeared that of the many creeks which had been staked since the start of the stampede a few had already proven rich in pay dirt. However, a still greater number had not panned out so well. Among the latter group belonged Squaw Creek. Though colors had been found in every claim along Squaw Creek and even nuggets in quantities that would have made the digging a paying proposition in any region more easily accessible than Ophir, the pay did not run in quantities to meet the great expense of working the ground.

The news that Squaw Creek had proven a hopeless proposition caused the three partners a feeling of mild regret. It was too bad, they admitted, that their present venture had not brought them the fortune that would have meant to them permanent surcease from all sordid toil. Still there was consolation in the fact that they had arrived at the melancholy knowledge at far less expense than the broken and discouraged figures whom they watched, toward spring, leaving the creek with their belongings packed on their sleds; to locate new ground before the avalanche of cheechakoes should inundate the district.

Not all of the disappointed prospectors on Squaw Creek were able to set out for pastures new. Some there were who had spent their all in last winter's venture and were unable to produce the necessary grubstake for a new attempt. These unlucky few stuck to their cabins that, for the time being, must remain their home until, with the coming of summer they could hire out their labor in an endeavor to gather another grubstake or, to await the rush of the newcomers and perhaps gain a hundred dollars or so by selling to them their doubtful claims.

"Blyme, if I don't believe them pore blokes 's hactually 'opin' ter sell their pock-marked claims to some newcomer arter break-up," the Kid remarked as he watched Hobson and Tate sitting in front of the former's cabin, smoking their pipes in the warm spring air. They were often seen together of late, idly passing the time and everything pointed to the fact that they were waiting for the time when the claim-hungry cheechakoes would overrun the country.

"A bally chanct they'll 'ave o' sellin' their claims alongside o' ourn," was the little Cockney's final comment as he took a hand in the solo game that was to reveal the fall-guy for the job of cooking the supper.

Finally even the last vestige of snow had disappeared from the hillsides, the ruffed grouse began to drum in the willow thickets by the creek, while the wild geese sailed in great and noise wedges toward the Arctic slopes. The ice had left the river some time ago and the arrival of the first up-river steamer was expected any day.

"Berhaps we bedder go down to Ophir City to be ready ven der cheechackers come," Dutch suggested as he carefully measured out a mess of beans from the small remnant in the sack. "Purty soon we got no more eats left und we ought to make shure und pilot some of the claim buyers to our blace up."

Slippery, who had been lying on his bunk all morning, absorbed in quiet meditations of his own, emerged from his trance at Dutch Henry's words.

"It'll be a dickens of a trail to Ophir at this time o' year where everythin' is mud an' swamp, an' I should hate ter go. Besides, 'tain't necessary," he remarked, jerking his thumb in the direction of Hobson's cabin. "Hobson an' Tate left fer town this mornin'. All we got ter do is

ter sit tight until our neighbors tows in some o' them cheechakoes, when we'll find some means ter let them know that we're willin' ter sacrifice our claims."

Dutch Henry nodded his fat head in token of approval.

"You sure are a smart guy, Slippery," he lauded. "Always you find somebody else vat does der tough work for us."

"Jess a matter o' usin' yer brains," Slippery drawled with becoming modesty.

THAT Slippery had been right in his surmise concerning their neighbor's trip to town was evidenced the very next day, when the partners saw them returning in company of a man whose new and outlandishly cut clothing easily marked him as a man just arrived from the States.

"A real genniwine come-on, a hinnocent lamb as was ever born," the Cockney Kid voiced the impression which the prospect made upon his hopeful mind. "Look at 'im: 'e's still a-wearin' of the first fleece. Hi say," he turned to his partners, "you blokes leave 'im to me. I knows just 'ow ter lure the candy from this bloomin' hinfant."

From the concealment of a thicket the trio watched Tate showing the prospective buyer over the claim. The two men stopped here and there at the different dumps and washed a pan now and then, an operation which seemed to attract the undivided interest of the stranger. Finally Tate returned to his cabin, leaving his guest to prosecute his investigation by himself. Without, apparently, being aware of the fact, the cheechako had gradually extended his investigation of the ground beyond the limit of Hobson's claim and was now engaged in carefully examining a pan of coarse gravel which he had taken from a bar that lay directly in front of the thicket where the three partners were concealed.

"Now's yore time," suggested Slippery as he shoved the little man out in the open.

Thus started, the little Cockney, with his hands in his pockets, strolled casually toward the stranger, who seemed unaware of his approach.

"'Ullo! 'ow's she pannin' out?"

The busy embryo prospector looked up in surprise and surveyed the intruder with guileless brown eyes that narrowed in a mystified way behind large, horn-rimmed glasses.

"I am not at all certain of that myself," the stranger replied as he fell to studying again the gravel in his gold pan. "I am just trying to determine which of the rocks in my pan here are the famous bedrocks that I have heard so much about. Jolly name, by the way—bedrock—don't you think so? Never saw the sort of rocks yet that I would care to make a bed of."

"If it's bedrocks yer lookin' for, Mr.—er——"

"Lilypond—Dulcius Lilypond of Seattle," the stranger introduced himself with a smile that showed perfect, well-kept teeth behind a brown Van Dyke beard.

"Glad to meet yer, Mr. Lilypond," the Kid acknowledged. "If it's bedrock yer lookin' for yer 'ave done well ter come up this far along the creek, 'cause ye'll never find it on ole 'Obson's claim. 'Im an' Tate 'as been diggin' it up all winter, as yer can see by the 'oles they left all over the claim. I 'as no doubt them coves is tryin' ter sell ye their claims after they has cleaned them out?"

"Why—eh—it's for the purpose of buying a parcel of gold-bearing ground that I came here."

"In that case yer struck it lucky ter meet me, Mister Lilypond! 'Ere you be'olds a parcel o' ground offered fer sale hexactly as bountiful nature 'as left it thousands o' years ago. Not a scratch of pick nor shovel ter mar the surface an' all the gold-bearin' bedrock still in place in each o' the three claims as is owned by meself an' me two partners. Yer hexperience as a gold miner 'll no doubt 'elp yer to happreciate the difference between our virgin ground an' the cleaned-out claims that 'Obson an' Tate is offerin' you."

"There is a difference, no doubt," Mr. Lilypond admitted thoughtfully, "but to be right frank with you, sir, I must confess that my experience as a prospector has up to now been confined to what I have read of this most romantic of all callings. For years it has been my secret ambition to follow the call of the stampede, to feel the thrill of the prospector when he sees the paystreak spreading out before him; but until lately my business has kept me chained to an unromantic existence in the city."

"An' what's yer business, if I map make so bowld ter arsk?"

"Why, I am an expert in ladies' hats," Mr. Dulcius Lilypond acknowledged bashfully while he wiped his glasses on a silk handkerchief.

"Oh?" was all the little Cockney was

able to reply when he was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing that necessitated the use of a large, printed and not overly clean pocket handkerchief which he employed ostentatiously while standing with his back to his new acquaintance.

"I has me spells o' hasthma now an' then," he explained apologetically. "They comes on me sudden-like when I least hexpect 'em. A hexpert in lydies' 'ats, ye say?" Another slight fit of coughing interrupted the little man at this juncture. "Why, now I kin jolly well see where yer gift fer judgin' gold-bearin' ground is come from. It's the hartistic sense in yer. I don't 'esitate ter sye that ye 'ave developed quite an 'appy himpression of the possibilities of ground along this 'ere creek?"

"It doesn't look bad to me, I must confess," Mr. Lilypond acknowledged, evidently a little flattered. "Besides, years ago a gypsy woman told me that some day I should reap a fortune from out of the ground. She was very definite——"

"P'raps the woman mentioned as 'ow ye'd 'ave ter dig fer it ter get to that fortune o' yours?" the Kid broke in.

"Yes, yes, to be sure: she mentioned that I would have to dig my fortune out of the ground."

This last admission by Mr. Lilypond seemed to settle the question for the Kid beyond all possibility of doubt.

"Ha!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, "Hi'm jolly well satisfied now this 'ere is the very ground the gypsy 'ad in mind. Right 'ere ye got more bloomin' hopportunity ter dig than on any other claim in Ophir district."

"How's that?"

"Don'tsher see? All them other claims is dug chuck full o' 'oles, leavin' this 'ere the only property where ye can muddle an' dig to yer heart's content."

"Hm—it does strike me as somewhat curious that you and your partners haven't given the ground a try, seeing that you feel so confident that it contains gold."

"Good Lor', mister! Hit's just because we 'as confidence that there is gowld in this ground that we dasn't stick a pick into it."

The stranger looked blandly questioning. The Kid approached closer and familiarly took hold of a button on Mr. Lilypond's fancy, belted jacket.

"You bein' a hexpert in lydies 'ats makes it doubtful whether you'll grasp the viewpoint of real, old-type sourdoughs as ye see in me an' me two partners," he volunteered. "'Owever, I'll do me best to hexplain it

E SEE, when we comes 'ere to size up the lay o' the land, our hexperience as prospectors tells us right orf that this 'ere is the mos' promisin' ground we has so far come acrost. As if that weren't enough, the first night we sleeps on this ground Dutch 'Enry, which is the oldest of us three, 'e 'as a dream an' in it 'e sees the ground we been sleepin' on all plastered with large nuggets. Two more nights Dutch 'as the same dream, but it is not until we're about finished buildin' the cabin that 'e busts on us with the question whether it'd be proper to wear moccasins with a tuxedo, an' what sort o' joo'lry it would best match an auburn-'aired lady.

"Mr. Wilson an' meself nat'rally gets to proddin' ol' Dutch as to what got them forrin hideas in 'is 'ead. Now, quite shamfaced-like, the ol' fool confesses to us that 'e 'asn't told us all of what 'e 'as seen in 'is dreams; that the space above the gowlden floor 'ad not been quite so hempty as it seemed from 'is first tellin' of 'is dream. No, the first night 'e dreamt that 'e saw a red-'eaded young woman a-dancin' on the gowlden floor. In 'is second dream Dutch be'olds the same scene again, but this time the woman seems to take a good deal o' notice o' poor ol' 'Enry, inwitin' 'im with 'er smiles to dance with 'er. The third night 'e dreamt 'e 'ad given in to the woman's wiles and was a-'oppin' it all over the gowlden floor with 'er.

"Now it might seem ridiculous to you to think of a bald-'eaded, fat ol' Johnny like Dutch a-'oppin' it around with a red-'eaded young siren, but to meself an' Mr. Wilson the hidea was no laughin' matter. We knew that there was somethin' 'id away in the make-up of good ol' Dutch of which probably even 'isself warn't aware, but which was bount to break out if the right hopportunity offered.

"All of them years that the three of us 'ad been partners we'd been as 'appy an' content as a litter o' pup malemutes. We 'ad come to like prospectin' so well that we were hactually scared o' strikin' it rich, for then we wouldn't 'ave 'ad no longer an excuse fer roamin' around the 'ills, which was the only life that kept us 'appy an' 'ealthy.

"But now, 'avin' 'eard Dutch tell of 'is

and accomplished the business of searching their pockets without the aid of the owners. With a reproachful look toward his partners he added their combined fortunes to his own capital and sallied forth from the place, jingling a half dollar and two quarters in his breeches pocket.

Thoroughly sobered now, as he was, the stout sailor's empty stomach clamored insistently for the solids which Dutch had failed to provide during the garish days just passed. The man made his way through the stir and agitation of the busy mining center until he arrived at a tent-roofed board frame, whose sign flared forth the claim of the cheapest eating place in the city.

Dutch entered the shack, which was empty save for the shirt-sleeved cook working at the range behind the counter. Dutch produced his entire fortune and laid it on the table before him.

"Here," he told the cook, "dis is all I got. Gif me der most vat dis will buy."

The proprietor of the modest culinary establishment cast a scornful glance at the three silver coins.

"Well, brother, your chicken feed won't buy much of a banquet in this corner of the world, but I'll see to it that you won't leave here hungry," he replied not unkindly. "How would a nice tonic of flopjacks an' bacon affect your constitution?"

"Fine, so long dere is blenty. I have such a hunger I could eat a boot."

"No need for any healthy man to go hungry in these diggin's. There is plenty of work for everybody and good wages too," the cook suggested while he beat the sourdough into a creamy batter.

He did not notice the slight shudder that went through the sailor's frame at his mention of work, but went on with his talk.

"Yep, plenty work. Only last night the owners of the Three Easy Men claim was in town lookin' for fifty miners to work on their new property."

"Three Easy Men! Is it called dot vay a mine?" Dutch inquired with mild interest while his eyes appraised the size of the flapjacks the cook poured upon the hot griddle.

"Yep, that's the name of what's goin' to be the greatest producer in Ophir district."

"I dink dot is a funy name. I vunder for vy dey call it so?"

"Ha-ha, funny is right!" the cook chuckled. "You should have been at the Paystreak Hotel last night and heard the owners of Three Easy Men tell the story of how they got a hold of their rich Squaw Creek property and you would know why they named it that way."

"Squaw Creek?" the customer asked with a sudden show of interest. "But dere is no gold in Squaw Creek."

"That's what everybody thought, except Hobson and Tate."

Dutch Henry's face had become very white now.

"I know dis fellows. Haf they anyding to do mith dot rich mine you speak of?" he asked breathlessly.

"Sure, Hobson, Tate and Lilypond is the name of the company that owns claims seven to eleven on Squaw Creek, which today is recognized as the richest piece of ground in the whole Ophir diggin's."

"*Ach*, der shipsy was right!" groaned the worried looking customer.

"What did you say?"

"Noddings."

Apparently unaware of his guest's sudden discomfiture, the loquacious cook continued to entertain him with the news that had just begun to rouse the district in laughter. "And the funniest part of the thing is that the three former owners lived on that rich ground all winter without ever taking the trouble of stickin' a pick into the ground. If they had dug just a few feet into the floor of their cabin they would have found more gold in the space that was covered by their roof than the three thousand dollars a cheechako paid them for their claims a few weeks ago."

"He was lucky," Dutch groaned in response.

"Lucky nothin'! That man Lilypond had reasons to suspect that their ground was worth a good deal more than they would ever dare to ask for it. You see," the cook enlarged on his report as he put a heaping plate of golden brown flapjacks in front of his customer, "you see, early last winter Hobson an' Tate, who owned the claims seven and eleven, discovered in each of their claims what at first looked to them like the beginnin' of a regular paystreak. In each of their claims the pay broadened and became richer as it approached the limits of the three claims that lay in between them. Gradually, as they followed it with their drifts, they began to suspect that Squaw Creek did not contain the usual paystreak running down the length of the valley; but they figured that, because of some volcanic displacement of the ground, whatever paystreak there once was had all been heaped into a spot, about a fraction of their own property and

mainly the three claims that lay in between them.

"Now, Hobson an' Tate are two honest old-time prospectors, an' they concluded among themselves that it would be no more 'n right to give the owners of the claims between theirs a hint that it would pay them to do some digging. But when they comes to see the owners of these claims they found them a worthless lot o' vagabonds, not willin' to do anything for themselves an' just waitin' for other hard-working miners along the creek to discover the paystreak for them.

"Later they hears that the three scamps is eager to sell their claims. The two old-timers figures that they might as well own the ground as some stranger who has done nothin' to help discover it. But they had to go easy about the deal, because if they, themselves had offered to buy the claims, the owners would naturally have become suspicious. But Hobson an' Tate are relatives, you see. Hobson had a nephew who was at that time holdin' down a fancy job as a buyer for the millinery department of the Bon Marche in Seattle. This nephew's name is Lilypond, and he is also the brother-in-law of Tate.

"'Spite of his funny occupation, this Lilypond is quite a regular fellow. He'd been grubstakin' the two relatives of his on several occasions, and, when they had a chance to pick up a good thing like them claims on Squaw Creek, Hobson an' Tate were glad to have their relative join them. So they sends him a cable message, tellin' him to chuck up his funny job an' come to Ophir on the first boat after the breakup. Of course, when he got here neither Hobson nor Tate considered it necessary to introduce Lilypond as their joint relative. Posin' as a cheechako, Lilypond had no trouble at all in gettin' hold of the ground owned by the three worthless scamps. Fact is them fellows almost sandbagged him into buyin' their million dollar property as soon as they caught sight of him. Perhaps it's for that reason Hobson, Tate and Lilypond named their new property Three Easy Men, because them smarties sure proved themselves the easiest simps that ever walked on snowshoes.

"But look here, stranger," the talkative cook added a moment later, when he beheld his customer with his head resting heavily betwen his hands and staring with a mournful countenance beyond the heaped plate which the cook had set before him. "I thougnt you said you was hungry? Why, your flapjacks is gettin' plumb cold if you don't fall to purty soon."

With a weary gesture the man shoved the plate away from him and rose to go.

"No, danks," he groaned dolefully; "all of a once I got a stomach ache."

North Africa *The Foreign Legion*

Newsom Again!

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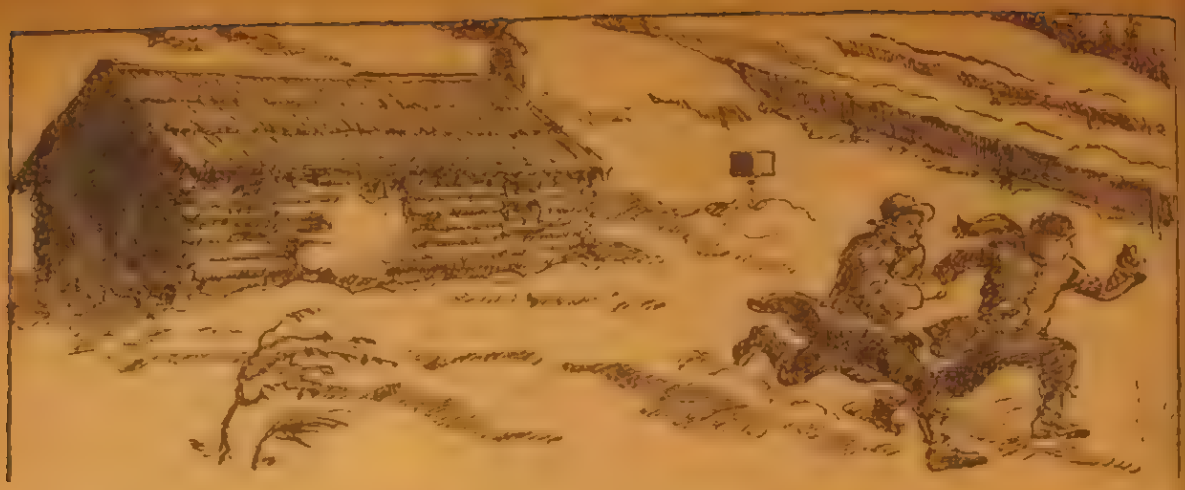
is the title of the latest Foreign Legion novelette by J. D. Newsom. In it Barbour and Dagliev come to the parting of the ways and settle it with bloody fists. It is Newsom at his best. Don't miss it in the next issue of

FRONTIER STORIES



KING OF THE THUNDERING BAR

By ROBERT V. CARR
Author of "The Seven Gay Riders," "Restless Guns," etc.

When boisterous, jovial old Jake Ender made a strike on Thundering Bar the old-timers of Driftwood rejoiced with him—but in the crowd were some newcomers of a different stripe, who saw in his good fortune a promise of easy money for themselves.

JAKE ENDER was entertaining his numerous friends and acquaintances in the White Front, Mike Holsom's saloon in Driftwood, a mining town strung down a long canyon, and more often called "Old Drift," or "Slim Town."

The big prospector pounded on the mahogany bar, hauled into the camp by bull train during the placer boom, and demanded action of the bartenders.

"Take notice, everybody," he yelled. "My grub and stable bills are paid. Room, meals and barber paid in advance. Mike there has a sack of my good money in his safe. I'm good for two weeks' jamboree, if I use fair judgment.

"And it's all clean money, boys, right from the hand of old Mother Nature. Shovel it into the sluice and pan it down. Out comes the clean, hard gold, with no skullduggery about it at all. A placer miner, I claim, is the straightest man on earth, unless it's Mike there. There's none squarer than him."

"One on the house," called Mike, from his post between the end of the bar and the big safe. "I appreciate the compliment."

"'Tis no compliment, Mike," laughed the happy Jake, "it's the bedrock truth." He tossed off a drink. "Move down this way; I've a surprise for you."

He plucked a nugget from his vest pocket and laid it on the bar. It was heart-shaped, and the size of a dollar.

"For you, Mike," he said simply.

Mike's hobby was odd-shaped nuggets. This one was a beauty. He picked it up, examined it closely, and then looked about him rather helplessly. What could he do for Jake?

"Never mind," laughed the big man. "'Tis only part payment for what you've done for me all these years." He turned to the crowd. "Boys, Mike here has taken care of my money since the placer boom, grub-staked me more times than I can remember, and been one of the best friends I ever had. Now he's worryin' about doin' something for me because I make him a little gift. Thinks I, when I found that nugget, 'That goes to Mike.' A touch of sentiment in it, boys. 'Tis a gold heart,' thinks I, 'and Mike has a heart of gold, and so it belongs to him.'"

Mike was unable to speak. He could only reach across the bar and pat the arm of his friend.

"What a grand thing," roared Jake, to relieve the emotional tension, "it is to be a placer miner! Boys, I'm king of the Thunderin' Bar—a group of claims strung down the crick. I found it, and it's mine. I've the finest cabin in the country, the biggest cellar, the best of everything. I live like a fightin' cock. Three hours a day shovelin' into the sluice—just enough to keep me in trim—gives me all I need. I know there is a ton or two of gold in the Thunderin' Bar, but why worry about it? It's safe there, as good a bank as I know of. I've enough to do me; why try to dig it all out at once?

"There are men who wouldn't rest till they'd a flume and a hydraulic outfit. They'd fret till they had the last color. But that's not my way, and never will be. One hundred days of light work and then into Old Drift for a jamboree. And the first place I strike is Mike's. Here a man is treated like a prince, here's what I like to look forward to. Here I find friends to warm my heart and good licker to warm my belly."

Jake knew what he was talking about. The White Front had a distinctive atmosphere. To the prospectors, it represented good feeling, comfort and security. It was cool and inviting in summer, warm and comfortable in winter. Along the wall opposite the bar was a line of big chairs, and no tobacco chewer was forced to go to the door or the stove to unload. When the winter wind howled down the canyon, the big stove, fed with sound pine, glowed redly day and night. If a prospector wanted to doze in one of the big chairs, that was his sacred right. It was strictly a saloon, with women and games barred.

While the "Red Shirts" had stripped the canyon of its placer gold and passed on, Driftwood was still a man's camp; a trading point for quartz miners and prospectors. It had lost some of the picturesqueness of the roaring 'Seventies, having laid aside its buckskins and hidden its six-shooters under its coat-tails and acquired those invariable adjuncts of civilization, church, jail and courthouse; but it still retained its old frontier liberality and freedom. All night long its lights burned brightly. Like a jeweled necklace, it lay in the canyon whose gold had brought it into being. It was still affectionately called the long, slim, wicked city.

A town for independent, quick-tempered, generous, hard, healthy masculinity. The stores kept extra big sizes in suits, boots, shoes and gloves. Restaurant and hotel proprietors served man-sized meals. They put it all on the table and each trencherman was expected to eat all he could hold. The doors were made to clear the hats of men over six feet tall. There was little a man could buy for less than twenty-five cents. Dimes were in circulation, but nickels and pennies were curiosities. The day and night marshals were selected for their judgment and steadiness. They were careful not to make any blatant announcement of their authority, for there were still hundreds of men in the camp who were far from gun-shy, and who were ready and eager to fight at the slightest infringement on what they considered their rights and liberties.

Jake Ender liked to sing, and he was no mean chantysmith. Some of his songs were not for sensitive ears or for the shrinking violet type, but in the main they were what a normal, healthy, free man would roar as he shoveled gravel into the sluice.

Jake never became helplessly drunk. A jamboree to him was no slobbering affair or sodden prostration in some back alley.

"Just enough to keep an edge," he would say. "'Never get down,' is my motto. I want to enjoy my stay in this man's camp, and if I go paralyzed drunk all enjoyment is at an end. Just nicely jingled, boys. A visit here and there with friends and then home to the cabin, and never a drop till I come again."

Now, hat on bar, head thrown back, and hand waving like a bandmaster's, he roared in basso profundo:

"I'm king of the Thunderin' bar, by cripes,
With none to say me nay;
I do as I will an' drink my fill,
An' always pay my way.

"How's that?" he laughed, his great hand smacking on the bar.

There came a crashing chorus of approval.

A THIN, slightly stooped, rat-nosed man, wearing a derby hat, a four-in-hand tie, and a starched shirt, had been listening to Jake's account of the riches of the Thundering Bar. He was a new arrival in the camp, a lawyer of the jack-

leg variety. His name was Peter Trimmer, but the camp, after one penetrating look, had dubbed him "Tricky" Trimmer.

Tricky maneuvered until he gained a position near Jake's elbow.

"That's a big holding you have," he remarked in his oily voice.

Jake turned slowly, like a bull elk. He would talk freely of his affairs to those he considered his friends, but he disliked comment or question from a stranger.

For several moments he somberly regarded the rat face under the derby hat. Tricky had the appearance of a man who needed to be dipped in some strong disinfectant. He was not Jake's kind.

"Who told you to shove in?" demanded the prospector, a shade of anger in his voice.

"I beg your pardon," said Tricky smoothly. "I couldn't help hearing what you said, and naturally thought you fortunate in owning so much valuable property. No offense meant, I assure you."

"There couldn't be," rumbled Jake. "If there was, you wouldn't be standin' on your feet." Then, his natural good nature asserting itself, he seized Tricky's bony hand and ground it in his iron grip.

Tricky strained, rose to his tiptoes, grinning like a chimpanzee at the excruciating pain. When Jake released his hand he wondered if he would ever be able to use it again. He put it back of him, fearful of another joint-grinding.

"What's the matter with you?" growled Jake. "Have a drink and pull yourself together."

Tricky took his drink in his left hand and swallowed it in one gulp. It seemed to stun him momentarily. His beady eyes glistened and his neck expanded like a lizard's.

"I'll give you my card," he finally gasped. "You may want some legal advice."

He handed the somewhat puzzled Jake a bit of pasteboard. The prospector held the card at arm's length and read aloud:

"Peter Trimmer, attorney-at-law."

With a throaty grunt, he tossed the card over his shoulder, swung out a huge arm and flung Tricky back.

"Don't need you!" he bellowed, waving a hand at Tricky's reflection in the back bar mirror. "I've got all the lawyer I need in a shoulder holster. It speaks all languages, and never lost a case."

He whirled suddenly, and with eger-demain quickness jammed Tricky's hat down over his eyes and ears, yanked his tie to hangman's noose tightness, and jerked out his shirt tail.

The crowd roared its delight as Tricky blindly struggled with his hat. When he could see, he looked about him wildly, and then charged out. On the sidewalk he discovered that his lengthy shirt tail was out. Frantically he stuffed it into his trousers, while the crowd in the saloon stamped and roared. Then, with thin lips tightly compressed and eyes rolling wildly, he slunk away.

Jake had merely stared with feigned wonderment at the much-dishevelled victim of his horseplay.

"Never saw a feller," he remarked with mock solemnity, "with too much shirt tail who was on the square. Want to find out a man's true nature, yank out his shirt. If he's wearin' a young sheet, chalk him down as either crazy or crooked. Well, what's next on the program?"

"Another song," suggested a crony.

This time Jake made careful preparation. He unbuttoned his vest, and loosened his collar. Then, with a hand on the shoulder of a friend and the other free to thump on the bar, he threw back his head and blared:

"There's just three reasons why, I think—
Why a jigger wants a drink:
Because he's dry,
A pard is nigh,
Or—any other reason why!

"Now boys, give me a hand in the chorus. Here we go!

"So line 'em up an' drink 'em down;
This one is on me.
Yes, line 'em up an' drink 'em down,
To this jamboree!"

They smashed into the refrain, their rough voices making the old saloon ring. Even Mike joined in. It pleased him to see men happy.

II

TRICKY TRIMMER, his bony hands locked behind him, was pacing to and fro in his little office, vainly trying to conjure up some plan for the trapping and ruination of Jake Ender.

The exhibition of the heart-shaped nug-

get and Jake's account of the wealth of the Thundering Bar had roused the jackleg's envy and greed, and set him to sorting over his collection of tricks with the hope of finding one that would secure him possession of the rich placer ground without risk to his own precious hide.

But the shameful memory of the snatching out of his shirt tail had filled him so full of animosity that he wobbled and lurched mentally. The sudden exposure of the nether end of his voluminous garment had been a terrible blow to his shabby genteel dignity. He had been a justice of the peace in a small town in the East and was still laboring under the delusion that his person was sacrosanct. To him, the shirt tail jerking was as frightful an offense against civilization as the twigging of the nose of a supreme court judge.

He secured some relief by visioning himself on the bench, with Jake Ender before him, loaded with chains, awaiting sentence for some heinous crime.

He paused and looked sternly at the imaginary criminal.

"To be hanged by the neck until dead, dead, dead," he muttered.

But that sentence failed to satisfy him. When a man was dead, his troubles were over. He changed it to "imprisonment for the balance of your natural life—at hard labor." That would give the big brute time to think over all the evil he had done.

He returned to reality with a jerk. He wasn't a judge; he was a lawyer, without diploma or clients, in a town that seemed to be entirely unaware of his existence. And he had little money—mighty little.

He yearned to punish the town for its indifference to Peter Trimmer, attorney-at-law. He panted for power that he might make its carefree citizens suffer. He visioned himself suddenly elevated to dictatorship. One of his first moves would be to close Mike Holsom's place. He filled his glass to the brim when some one treated him, but he felt a glow of self-righteousness now. He saw himself sternly "cleaning up" the town.

All places of amusement would be closed. Such "dangerous men" as Jake Ender he would put in jail. Such menaces to the morals of the community as Mike Holsom would be banished. His officers would be busy arresting men and bringing them before him for sentence. Each arrest would symbolize the power and importance of Mayor Peter Trimmer.

Again he returned to reality with a jerk. How could he secure possession of Ender's claims, and thus gain wealth and revenge in one swoop? He had been in the camp only a few weeks, and his knowledge of mining law was as limited as his comprehension of the frontier spirit. He did not know that Driftwood, though possessing all the trappings of the law, was still a frontier town, and that it still regarded possession of a mining claim as good and sufficient title, especially when the same was backed by a determined occupant with a cocked rifle in his hands.

Then, in his mental scurryings, he thought of Bird T. Wippet, a man from his home town. Bird had been in Driftwood several months, and would know all about mining law. He had some money, too.

Bird was contemplating unloading a trunkful of mining stock on the farmers in his home state, but the Ender proposition would offer greater inducements than the peddling of specimens of the printer's art. Once they were in possession of the property, Bird's money would erect a flume and install a hydraulic outfit. In a few months, Driftwood would look up to Peter Trimmer. With plenty of money to oil the way he would then launch his political career. First, mayor of Driftwood; that he might find some excuse for the closing of Mike Holsom's place and the placing of Jake Ender behind jail bars.

It would not be a personal matter with him, he told himself smugly; it would be for the improvement of the morals of the community. Men would say, "Mayor Trimmer is a clean man." He could drink in secret and slip down to some Eastern city when he desired to relax from the cares of office. Then, circuit judge one term. After that, supreme judge of the state. Lastly a Federal judge, a life job, with autocratic powers. Once a Federal Judge, he could do as he pleased.

Once more he returned to reality with a jerk. He must stop toying with the future and stick to the present.

BIRD T. WIPPET was a pony-sized man with red curls and a cherubic face, but his lead-colored eyes, small and expressionless, indicated his ability to look out for his own interests. He used many startling expressions, and was given to cannon cracker explosions of mirthless laughter. He was extremely frank with those he considered his in-

feriors and smooth and ingratiating with those he considered his superiors. He measured all men by the money they possessed.

But Trimmer found him seemingly dubious about the Ender proposition.

"Chances are, Pete, you don't know what you're heading into," he said. "You always were hammer-headed. Looking at you now, I see your head does look like a hammer. Tie your legs together and a man could drive nails with your nose. But that's neither here nor there."

Mr. Wippet, it was plain, considered Tricky his inferior. The jackleg, beyond a sickly grin, betrayed no resentment. He knew, if he secured the coöperation of the little trickster, he would have to swallow his insults. Later on, he promised himself, he would trim Bird's claws.

"You come to me," Wippet went on, "with a deal and nothing in your head to put it over. Suppose I take hold, what's your idea about the split?"

"We would share equally," Tricky replied solemnly. "I furnish the legal advice; you furnish the money."

"Legal advice!" Mr. Whippet released his cannon cracker laugh. "I furnish the money—and brains, you furnish legal advice! That's certainly rich—rich as an old maid's dream."

Mr. Wippet's features had suffered no displacement, his lead-colored eyes held no gleam of mirth. His laugh was purely mechanical; he could touch it off at will.

"How do you think you'd go about getting hold of the property?" he demanded contemptuously. "Go out and shake a feather at Ender, I suppose? Say his claims are jumpable, what do you think you can do about it?"

"I don't know," admitted Tricky tamely. "That's why I come to you. What's the legal procedure?"

"Well, my poor, half-witted friend," Mr. Wippet condescended to explain, "you first find out if Ender has done his assessment work. If he has not, you slap location notices over his old ones, and record the claims and—" here he paused impressively—"leave word with the undertaker."

Tricky shuddered inwardly.

"But there's the law," he managed to point out. "We would be within our rights. The law would protect us."

"Don't get no leaping idea about the law protecting you," chided Mr. Wippet. "I've been in this country a lot longer than you, Pete, and I see you got a barrel of want in you to a pinch of know-how. It will be no light sashay to grab them claims. Such men as that Jake Ender are as hard as a keg of nails in an ice house. They think nothing of trimming out a man's liver and feeding it to a setter dog."

"But we would have the sheriff back of us," persisted Tricky, obsessed with the might and majesty of the law. "If Enders offered any resistance, after we had taken over the claims, the officers would shoot him down like a dog." He recalled the shirt-snatching, an incident he had neglected to mention to Mr. Wippet, and ground his teeth. "And 'twould serve him just right."

Mr. Wippet scratched his nose delicately.

"You see, Pete, you got no brains," he explained. "I always knowed you had no brains. You got a place to put them, and look human and all that, but there's nothing there." He tapped his forehead significantly. "Nothing there, no more than in a chicken's. You don't seem to realize that this Jake Ender would give both of us a pair of angel wings as quick as a cat could lick its left paw. Heaven is paved with gold, but you can't ship it. Get my idea, Pete? Of course you don't; but try to think how you'd look, down on the cold, cold ground, with four or five hunks of chilled lead in your warm, quivering, purple, personal in-test-tines."

Tricky Trimmer blenched at the little promoter's ghastly realism, and patted his stomach tenderly.

"That got you, didn't it?" Wippet roared. He had a tremendous bark for so small a dog. "But while I've been sitting here, I've been using my brain. I'll have my boys give me a quit-claim deed to the Ender claims. I know a justice of the peace who'll date it up to January second, the time all good claim-jumping is done in this country. My boys are good, rough men who'd knock their grandmothers on the head for a hundred dollars. I brought them in with me, and know how far they'll go.

"They'll do the posting of the notices, and the notices will carry their names. After I've recorded the claims and the deed, I'll sweeten them up so they can skip the country. We'll then stand as straight purchasers of the property, and no man can find any fault with that. We'll be in good shape to call on the sheriff to oust Ender and to protect us. You spoke of Ender showing a big nugget and bragging how rich the ground was. What did he think it would show under hydraulic?"

AID he was sure there was between one and two tons of gold in it, but that he was satisfied with what he could shovel out in a few hours' work a day."

Tricky was now jubilant. Bird had found a way to secure the property without any risk. It was a perfect plan. He attempted a bland smile, but it only evoked insulting comment from his fellow conspirator.

"Never try to smile, Pete," Mr. Wippet advised. "You look bad enough as it is, but when you try to smile, anybody can see how crooked you be.

"But let's get down to business. The quit-claim deed from my men will convey a four-fifth interest in the claims to me and one-fifth to you. I'm putting up the money for the initial expense, and twenty per cent. is five times what you're entitled to. You've furnished nothing but a vacant stare."

"The legal advice!" squealed Tricky, dry-washing his hands furiously. "The legal advice!"

"Legal advice, hell!" barked Wippet contemptuously. "You don't suppose I'm going to gamble my good clean money and let you lie back on your shoulder blades on a bed of roses and draw half the profits? Pete, you may have met me several times, but you only recognize my body when you see it. Twenty per cent. and no more, is what you get.

"Ender may have just been blowing, but I'm gambling that the ground is rich. If there's, say, a ton of gold in the bar, that means around four hundred thousand dollars, with eighty to you. You can't pronounce eighty thousand dollars, let alone think about it. And another little point: every chance I take with my in-test-tines, you puts yours up equal. Get that through what you use to keep your hat off your shoulders. My boys will do the rough work, but it may be necessary for us to join in for a spell. You won't hang back and hide under the sidewalk with your legal advice. You'll expose your liver to the same chances as beat down on mine."

"What's the first move?" Tricky asked faintly.

"To get the lay of the land. We'll take a trip out to the Ender place——"

Tricky's hands flopped like dying fish.

"I couldn't do that," he objected weakly. "Ender and I had some words today. I don't—don't care to meet him."

Mr. Wippet leaned back in his chair and closed one eye.

"Ah, I see," he murmured sweetly. Then he straightened up and planned briskly. "He don't need to see you nor me neither. We'll take the boys along, and they can spot his discovery notices. If they run against Ender, they can say they're on a deer hunt. We can get somewhere and look over the land from a distance. The boys can circle around and come back to us. We'll make a map of the ground and then back to town.

"I may say now, that at first I didn't think much of the proposition, but after I got my head to work it all straightened out as clear as a rich widow's future. But don't forget, in this deal, I take the lead and you follow. On January first we'll drive out to Ender's place and see whether or no he's done his assessment work.

"If not, on January second, around ten minutes after midnight, my boys will put up location notices, come back to town with us and record the claims and, then, with my good money rattling in their pants, skip the country. We'll set back with the quit-claim deed to the property, all properly signed, sealed and recorded.

"By and by, we'll notify Ender to vacate. If he shows fight, we'll call on the law. Simple as grease on a fly's foot, providing you keep your blab shut and don't try to think. If it ever got out, our middle names would be mud.

"If one cheep gets to Ender, you'll hear the report of a rifle. Right following said report or, maybe, said reports, you'll fall in seven different directions. On examination of the body, as hereinbefore mentioned, they'll find four or five hunks of chilled lead in the warm, quivering, purple, personal in-test-tines. Set that to music, Pete, so you won't forget it. Do you gather the magnitude of my remarks?"

"Yes," gulped Tricky.

"Human," murmured Mr. Wippet, "as human as if he had good sense."

III

AKE had enjoyed every red moment of his jamboree, but contemplation of his return to his own comfortable cabin brought him greater happiness.

He was on the home trail now, with his wagon piled high with supplies. His big horses, Nig and Joe,

walked briskly. They knew a warm stable and good oat hay awaited them at the end of the road. Clipper, Jake's roan saddle horse, trailed behind. He, too, had horse-thoughts of the warm stable and the good oat hay, and the kindly being who gave him a handful of sugar now and then.

The prospector, after the fashion of men who lived much alone, talked to his horses.

"We're all set for winter, boys," he told them happily, "and we got money left. Thought I'd spent it all, but come to find out, Mike had held out half of it. Said he thought I'd gone far enough, gave me my money and sent me home. Yes, siree, boys, Mike sent me home. Man that's your banker, you can't fool with him. Got to obey orders.

"You fellers won't have no troubles this winter. Nothin' to do but eat your fool heads off. Maybe get down a little wood, but that's all. Clipper back there will be with you, and with nothin' to do but take me over to Silver Crick now and then or pack in a deer. Lucky horses, you three.

"And I'm a lucky man, as sure as I set here on this seat. Cellar will be packed and jammed with grub. Two or three deer hangin' up. Plenty of readin' matter. Wood piled up high. Now and then some pard comes in—Dave Strong or somebody. No woman to bother or tell me what to do. Conscience clear as a bell. Devilment worked out of me with two weeks o' coltin' round in Old Drift. Calm as you please now.

"Finest cabin in this country snug, warm and handy. Richest diggin's—plenty for the rest of my life. Fifty years old and not an ache nor a pain. Big as a mule and as healthy. Record clear; never beat a man out of a dollar. What I got I made with my own hands. King of the Thunderin' Bar, and wouldn't trade places with no other king, not if he'd throw in four queens to boot."

The shirt-snatching incident had made no dent in Jake's memory. Thirty years on the frontier, with countless adventures and jamborees back of him, made such incidents unworthy of mind-room. In his twenties and thirties he had wandered from camp to camp, a gamboling giant, rough as a playful grizzly, indifferent to hardship, careless of the future. He had fought more men and loved more women than he could remember. And there were no gray hairs in his brown thatch or the long mustache that swept his bronzed jaw. His teeth were as sound as any youth's, and he had never known a day of sickness. Back of him was a long line of fighting men and pioneers.

His jamborees had in no way depleted his vitality. Storing up energy in the open, with wholesome food and rough work, a two weeks jamboree had no more effect on him than spending five hundred dollars would have on the financial resources of a multi-millionaire.

"Nights gettin' frosty now," he went on, "but I'll have a month or so of shovelin' into the sluice. It will be right pleasant, boys, after all that racket in town. Sweet music to hear the swish of the gravel in the sluice. Throw her in and let the water do the rest. I like the smell of fresh water, old horses. And the pines have a sniff that cheers me. We know the Thunderin' Bar, we do, every inch of it. Rich as mud and all our own. A few shovelfuls, a smoke, and, if the head is workin' right, a song. Cabin never locked; anybody welcome. A big, easy life, I'm sayin', boys. Well, now, you scamps, giddap. I want a good meal from my own stove, I want to set at my own fireplace and lay down in my own bed. Nothin' like home, sweet home!"

Nig and Joe tossed their heads and quickened their pace. Clipper, feeling a sudden urge of coltishness, ran ahead and kicked up his heels.

"By cripes," laughed Jake, "Clipper's showin' off! Look at the son-of-a-gun! You'd think he was a two-year-old instead of ten comin' next spring."

The man looked around him benignly. This was his country, and he loved every open park, every canyon, every hill.

The sumach flamed amid aspen gold. Yellow-hammers dipped across the intervales. The red squirrel, gathering his winter provender, scolded impudently as the wagon rumbled through the pines. Deer sped up the sunlight-dappled aisles and pheasants whirred across the road. Over all the haze of Indian summer.

And it was given to Jake Ender to appreciate all the beauty spread before him, for, with all his rough exterior, his was the nature of a dreamer.

"She's a world of glory," he murmured contentedly, "I'm certainly glad I'm alive this day."

The nighthawks were booming when Nig and Joe turned into the canyon of the Thundering Bar. Clipper, the impatient, galloped on ahead, head high, tail proudly elevated.

Of their own accord, the team halted in the clear cold water of Thundering creek, and with much bit-champing, drank their

fill. Then eagerly they forded the stream and pressed on up the canyon.

Jake was not surprised when he saw that his cabin windows were gleaming like squares of gold in the purple dusk. He never locked his cabin. No doubt Dave Strong or some other friend was awaiting his coming. He hoped it was old Dave. They'd have a good long visit. Dave was a wise old he-coon, and an easy man to have around. He knew how to make a venison pie that would make a man fight a silvertip barehanded. Always had a lot of good stories to tell and was well-informed. Read everything and never forgot what he read. A loyal friend and honest as the day was long. Always showed up about every so often.

But no Dave came forth to give him hearty greeting. With a feeling of disappointment, not untouched by loneliness, he drove into the yard between his cabin and the big cellar, and swung down from the seat. Then hope blossomed in his heart. Maybe Dave had heard him coming and was hurrying to get supper for him.

In his buffalo overcoat, he looked like a big grizzly as he strode across the yard.

"Dave, you old scoundrel," he bellowed as he flung open the door, how the——"

ABRUPTLY he halted, mouth agape, eyes wide with surprise and wonderment. Near his big cookstove stood three little girls and a baby boy, ragged, forlorn and a little fearful. Before them, like a captain in front of his company, stood a boy about twelves years of age. Suffering and responsibility had aged him, but on his thin face was the stamp of nobility. His clear gray eyes held no shadow of fear.

"We used some of your flour, sir," he explained before Jake could speak, "and some syrup, but that was all. I'll work to pay for it."

Frankness and honesty rang in his young voice. He was a child with the heart and soul of a fearless, honest man.

Jake's great heart melted. These were children, ragged, dirty, forlorn and forsaken. This thin-faced boy had suffered much, and it was plain that he considered himself responsible for the welfare of the other children. A young brave!

The prospector jerked off his mittens, strode across the cabin and took the boy's thin hand in his great warm palm.

"Lord bless you, son, you're welcome to anything in Jake Ender's cabin. What's your name, boy?"

"Diamond Neemer," answered the youngster. "Di for short."

Jake dropped on his knees before the little company, and spread out his arms. The baby boy came to him fearlessly, the little girls shyly. His great arms closed about them all.

"What's your names?"

"Ruby," answered the eldest girl.

"Pearl," murmured the next.

"Opal," the youngest informed him. She patted the baby boy's head. "His name is Emerald, but we call him Little Raldy," she volunteered eagerly.

"A collection of precious jewels," laughed Jake. "But what am I thinkin' of!" He sprang to his feet. "First thing, a good hot supper. We can visit afterward. Now, let's see. We'll have some beefsteak and gravy, fried taters and onions, bread and butter, gingersnaps and sweet crackers and canned peaches. How does that hit you?"

They smiled, but made no comment. They were quiet children.

"I guess that will do," grinned Jake. "Now, girls, you can set the table, and you get the fire boomin', Di. Better put Raldy where he can take a nap. Poor young'un looks wore out. It won't be long."

Never before had Jake shown so much speed in preparing a meal. Soon appetizing odors filled the cabin. Little Raldy's lips moved, and a little dribble ran out of the corner of his mouth. Jake gave him a piece of beefsteak to take the edge off his hunger. A strange happiness thrilled the big prospector. The cabin had never seemed more cheerful. When the smoking meal was on the table, he called the children to him.

"What say everybody give us a kiss before we eat? It will help make the grub taste better." He dropped to his knees.

Raldy seemed to know what was expected, for he put his arms around Jake's neck, grunted and gave him a hug, followed by a wet smack. The little girls kissed him shyly. Di, reserved, and regarding kissing as somewhat effeminate, took the man's hand and patted it. He was so full of gratitude he could not speak.

They were soon seated at the table. Raldy was at Jake's left, with a spoon to shovel meat, potatoes and gravy into a face that was soon to be daubed to the ears.

It was plain to the man that the children were half-starved. They ate like

famished wolf cubs. Pausing for breath, they looked at him adoringly. To them he meant food, shelter, protection and love. To them he was a god.

Jake thought of his team, standing in the cold.

"Go right on and eat, kids," he told them. "Help yourselves. Di, open up more peaches if you want 'em; plenty more on the wagon. Eat all you want of everything. I'll be back as soon as I put up the horses."

"I'll go with you, Mister Ender," the boy volunteered, in his manly way. "I put our horse and cow in your barn, and I guess they'll be in your way. I gave them some of your hay, too. They were hungry, and——"

"Now, young feller," growled Jake, with mock fierceness, "I don't want to hear nothin' about that. Anything on the Thunderin' Bar is yours. As for that 'Mister Ender,' that don't sound good. What say you call me Daddy Jake for a spell? 'Yes, sir!' and 'No, sir!' sounds fine, and shows you're well raised; but, if we're goin' to love one another, we can't have no 'Mister' around this camp. What is it, Di, 'Mister Ender' or Daddy Jake?"

"Daddy Jake," murmured the boy softly.

"All right, son, and just you set there and eat. Little Raldy's about ready to fall over. When he's through eatin', put him on one of the beds back of the curtain."

He lighted a lantern and rushed out.

"You got some visitors tonight—that wore-out horse and that old muley cow," he confided to Nig and Joe while he was stuffing the manger with fragrant oat hay. "Don't think the cow disgraces you, boys, for she fed five of the finest kids that ever lived. The youngsters are all up to my cabin, stuffed full of grub and snug and warm. They'll sleep under blankets and buffalo robes tonight. I'll soon have them fat and sassy. Nothin' goes hungry' round Jake's place, as you two lazy old fat scoundrels know. Those youngsters will come out in the spring as slick as cub bears.

"Oh, yes, I'm goin' to keep them. Don't know who they belong to or what, and don't care. I look at the bedrock facts, boys, and pay no attention to the trimmin's. The Thunderin' Bar will take care of a dozen sets of kids, and why shouldn't I keep them? Anybody who will bring five children into the world, when they've nothin' to give them, hasn't got a claim on them to beat Jake Ender's. Jake will feed and clothe 'em, love 'em and protect 'em, and that's the claim that counts. You fellers will get a square deal as usual, but you'll have to take a back seat, you and Clipper. A family man can't give too much pettin' to horses."

IV

LITTLE RALDY and his three sisters were asleep in one of Jake's big beds, back of the rather gorgeous curtain that divided the twenty-by-forty room. Jake had hauled the other bed into the kitchen. Now, in his favorite homemade rocker, his pipe drawing freely, he bade Di tell the story of his wanderings, and how he came to Thundering Bar.

"I know you're wore out, son, but tell me all about it, so after you turn in I can set here and figger a little on what I'm goin' to do for you."

"It was this way," began the boy in his calm voice. "Father was sick so much that mother said he wasn't any good. She said she was tired of wandering around in an old covered wagon and having children. One day she went away. We waited for her, but she did not come back. Father then said he would have to be both father and mother to us and that I would have to help him.

"He drove and drove, father did. He wanted to find a home for us, a farm with trees and running water on it. He was a school teacher, and he taught us things as we looked for the farm. But it was so hard for him to work. I guess he didn't know how. Sometimes he'd get lost and didn't know where he was. Once the wagon wheel broke and he didn't know how to fix it. I remembered seeing a blacksmith fix a wagon wheel and so I told father, but he couldn't fix it good. He had needles and thread, but he couldn't sew good.

"Mother couldn't sew either; she hated sewing and cooking. Once a woman, in a wagon we met, sewed for us and she could sew and cook good. But she had children and couldn't look after us.

"Father said to me, 'Di, your mother was not to blame for leaving us. I am to blame for it all. I have no right to children, as I have no ability to work for them.' That's just what my father said. I remember every word he said and what they meant. He was a school teacher and taught us words, but it was hard for him to get us something to eat and wear. All the time I thought, 'When I get big enough,

I'll get the girls and Little Raldy all they want to eat, and father, too.'

"We all slept in the wagon to keep warm, as we didn't have many covers. One morning I got up to build a fire and to get some water. The girls got up and took care of Raldy. But father didn't get up. We waited for him to get up, because he was sick. I got breakfast—pancakes and grease—and then climbed into the wagon and touched father. He didn't say anything, and I took hold of his arm. I don't know how I knew about it, but pretty soon I knew he was dead. I wondered what I would do. You see, Daddy Jake, it wasn't so much that my father was dead as it was that there was so little to eat for the girls and Little Raldy, and I had to look after them.

"I thought I wouldn't say anything to Pearl and Opal about father being dead, but I told Ruby. She cried, but I told her to hush, as we had to look after Pearl and Opal and Little Raldy. So we covered father up in the wagon, and took the good horse and the cow and what grub we had and started out. You see, one of the horses was crippled up, and father didn't know what to do for him, so we left him. I put the girls and Little Raldy on the horse, with the grub and something to cook with, and started out toward the mountains.

"At night we camped. We got pretty cold, as I'd left the covers for father. I would sleep a little and wake up and put wood on the fire. We didn't see anything but wild cattle on the prairies and some deer when we got in the mountains. I wished for a gun so I could kill some cattle or deer and give the girls and Little Raldy some meat to eat.

"When we got in the mountains we only had a little flour left and a piece of salt pork. The cow didn't give much milk, and Little Raldy needed it. I didn't know what to do when I made pancakes out of the last of the flour and fried the last of the pork and gave it to the girls."

"How about yourself, son?" asked Jake softly, his hand on the boy's thin shoulder. "Weren't you eatin' any of the flapjacks and pork?"

Di looked at him as if wondering how a man could ask such a foolish question.

"Why, I was taking my father's place, don't you see? If you're a man, you can't eat when your sisters and little brother need it. Don't you see how it was, Daddy Jake?"

"I sure do," smiled Jake affectionately. "I sure see how it was, young pard. You did the right thing, and you're a man. I'm proud of you, Di. Then what did you do?"

WELL, we saw the road and followed it up to this cabin. I didn't want to touch anything, as father had always told us not to touch anything that did not belong to us. He taught us things, father did. Told us we must say, 'No, sir,' and 'Yes, sir,' tell the truth and never touch anything that did not belong to us. And he said, 'You must always love one another.'

"But the girls were so hungry that I thought it would be all right if I made some pancakes out of your flour. We ate the pancakes and slept a little and then you came."

"And how would you like to stay with me, Di, you and your sisters and Little Raldy? Plenty to eat and good clothes, and helpin' Daddy Jake shovel into the sluice. No more trouble, no more goin' hungry, no more wanderin' around. What say you, son?"

The boy sighed his relief. It was plain that he was used to repressing his emotions. He leaned against Jake, evidently experiencing great difficulty in finding words to express his gratitude.

"I'll work for you when I grow up, and pay for my grub and my sisters' and Little Raldy's," he said finally.

Jake shook his head and drew the boy down on his knee.

"That's not it, Di," he rumbled. "What Jake wants to know is whether you and your sisters and Little Raldy can learn to love him and be his children?"

All the repressed emotion in the boy's heart now broke. He had been under a terrible strain. Here was a big, warm-hearted man who fairly radiated security. After all twelves years is no advanced age. His head drooped against Jake's broad chest. He did not cry, but the man could feel him shiver.

"Never you fret, son," soothed the prospector, rocking a little. "Jake will fight for you to the last ditch. Everything in the cabin is yours. Want a gun, there is a dozen to pick from. Want a pony, there's Clipper to ride, or I'll get you another. Want books, Jake will get 'em for you. All you have to do in return for all that is just to love me. And come Christ-

mas night, son, we'll have one of the biggest trees in this country, with a dance and plenty to eat and all the kids in the country here for a big frolic."

Di's masculine stoicism broke. He put his arms around Jake's neck and actually kissed him, blindly and awkwardly.

Jake gave him a mighty hug, rose and swung him up in the air and dropped him on the bed.

Di laughed now. He could see a lot of fun ahead with Daddy Jake. It was pleasant to be tossed in the air, even if he was tired and sleepy.

"Get undressed, young feller," growled the man, with mock fierceness, "or I'll give you a cuff on the ear. Get under them covers. Never mind if it's cold and windy outside. Everybody's snug and warm in this cabin, and there's plenty of grub. We'll have a big breakfast, bacon and eggs and hot biscuits. Get to sleep now."

When the boy was asleep, Jake rested his huge feet on the stove hearth and pondered the future.

He could take the children to Driftwood and turn them over to the authorities, but he wasn't going to do that, not by a long shot. A hell of a note to turn over a game young rooster like Di to the county, like he was a stray colt or some such thing!

Might get a woman to come and care for them. No, he wouldn't do that. Woman or two over to Silver Creek who would fix up clothes for them and do their washing, but he'd have no woman raising them. Didn't need no woman to raise his children. There was Di to consider. A woman made a boy soft. He would raise Di like a man. Boy was game and honest and would grow up to be as fine a man as ever lived. Wouldn't have no woman around, filling Di full of her notions and fears. Di was a man and would get a man's deal. As for the little girls, he might send them, now and then, to some woman in Driftwood, to go to school, but he would have them during the summers. But he'd have no woman around the cabin. The girls could look after Raldy, and they'd all get along in good shape. He'd adopt them legally as quick as he could get to it.

He was glad now that he was a "handy" man. There was not a shade of effeminacy in his nature, but he could cook and sew better than the average woman. He could use a broad ax or a needle with equal skill. There were cupboards and shelves in his cabin, and places for everything he possessed. His guns were always clean and oiled, his books and papers where they belonged, his lamps filled and their chimneys spotless.

The children would acquire no slapdash habits from him; they would learn system and order. He would build an addition on the cabin and every youngster would have a place for his or her belongings and keep them there. He would have three good meals a day, and each child would have so much work to do. Evenings they would read or study. He would get them books and a blackboard. Next winter he would send them to school at Silver Creek. They would have a team of ponies and a buckboard, and their dinner pails would be full of good grub. No man or woman could say that Jake Ender didn't look out for his children.

V

JAKE and Di shoveled the rich dirt into the murmuring sluice—the murmuring sluice that the imitative Little Raldy called "mimi-mimi." The little girls built playhouses of sticks and stones or made doll dresses. Their soft voices blended sweetly with the voice of the hurrying water.

Many songs came to Jake as he shoveled into the sluice. But they were not jamboree chanties; they were songs with such refrains as:

I got strong arms, I got rich dirt
To feed the gulpin' waters;
I got a cellar full of grub,
Two sons and three fine daughters.

Never before had he had a more appreciative audience, never before had he sung so happily. The children had not only brought him love but luck in the shape of many thumping nuggets in the clean-up. The king of the Thundering Bar would not have traded places with any man on earth.

He had taken his family to the town at the terminus of the railroad, since the stores there carried bigger stocks than Driftwood's, with a greater variety from which to select winter outfits for the girls. Each youngster had been outfitted from head to foot. He had bought another horse and another wagon, for one wagon would not hold his purchases. It was his plan to build an addition on the cabin as soon as he could get time to ride over to Dave

Strong's camp and ask his old friend to help him raise the logs. He had bought furniture for the girl's room, and warm blankets and quilts. Then there had been a great assortment of Christmas presents, not only for his own brood but for every child he knew in the district.

And finally, through an accommodating judge, adoption proceedings had been started.

Jake had no trouble with his fosterlings. They were quiet, obedient children. With good wholesome food, they soon blossomed into red-cheecked, lusty, happy youngsters. Their love for their foster father was adoration itself. Calm, thoughtful, gray-eyed Di would have given his life for the big prospector as quickly as he would have given him a smile.

When Jake showed him the discovery notices of the eight claims that formed the heart of the Thundering Bar, he resolved, if ever Daddy Jake needed his help, to fight to the last gasp to defend those symbols of possession.

"These claims, Di, are as much yours as mine, now," Jake told him. "You're my pon and pard, and if you ever see a man foolin' with our notices, you take down one of my rifles and cut loose at him. Bounce ome lead near him, Di, and if he don't move, bounce some more a little nearer. This is your ground and don't you forget t. Always be ready, Di, to fight for what is rightfully yours. Be square with everybody, give when you can, but for what is rightfully yours fight to the last ditch."

The children never tired of the clean-up. When they saw the dull gleam of the gold, they always laughed. Now and then Jake put some quicksilver in the sluice. It was always a wonder to the children to see him put the pan on the stove "to cook the gold." They watched until the gold appeared. It seemed like magic to them.

Rich days. In the morning, the fragrance of frying bacon and boiling coffee drifting through the half-open cabin door. Little Raldy in his high chair by the stove, the girls setting the table, Di bringing in wood. Jake, the ever-benign, fresh-shaven, and clear-eyed, preparing breakfast.

After the clean-up, supper. Perhaps a chunk of venison that had been roasting for hours in a Dutch oven, with some bacon, onions and potatoes to enrich it. Jake had bought another cow, and there was plenty of rich, sweet milk for the children. He took one day a week for baking. He baked rich cookies and packed them into big jars. He thought nothing of making a dozen apple pies. Jake's arithmetic had been sadly neglected. He never could learn to divide a pie into more than three pieces.

When he gave one of his youngsters a piece of apple pie, it was a wedge nearly as big as his hand. He sprinkled it liberally with sugar, poured pure, rich cream over it and handed it to the child.

"Get outside of that. There's plenty more where it come from," would be his admonition.

After supper, he always romped with the youngsters or devised some game to play. After the romp, he read to them or had them read their lessons to him.

IN THE end wall of the bedroom was a big fireplace. Jake would draw the curtain back, and put a back log in the fireplace. Soon the big room would be warm and cheerful. On the table a pan of apples and nuts. Little Raldy, poddy with bread and milk, his head against Jake's chest, staring contentedly at the leaping flames. Di, sprawled out on the bearskin before the fireplace, but always in a position that enabled him to see his foster father. He never tired of looking at that big, bronzed face.

Bedtime. One by one the little girls would come to the man whom they adored and kiss him goodnight. But Di always liked to "stay up a little while." When the other children were asleep he liked to sit at the side of his foster father and look at the fire.

"I just like to be with him," he would have said had he expressed his feelings.

The five were soon convinced that there was nothing in the world that their foster father feared and no obstacle he could not overcome. They never disobeyed him, for it was too great a privilege to be asked to do something for him. His frown was a calamity too great even to be considered. Even Little Raldy wanted to do something for Daddy Jake. He brought in wood, grunting loudly. Jake made him a little wooden shovel, and he toiled manfully, throwing a spoonful into the sluice now and then.

Misfortune and hardship had disciplined them. The memories of their parents were dim, but they did not forget that once they had been hungry, ragged, forlorn and for-

saken. When they thought of their days of poverty, their love for their foster father became more intense. He was their protector. Never again would they have to eat pancakes and grease three times a day. Never again would they be dirty and ragged. Daddy Jake would take care of them.

VI

IDAFTERNOON of New Year's Day. A foot of snow had covered all the scars that Jake's pick and shovel had made in the heart of the Thundering Bar, and reduced the string of sluice boxes to a thin dark line. The boxed discovery notice looked like a dark goblet laden with white flowers.

Near the back door of the cabin stood Clipper, pawing at the hard ground. On his back was a roomy saddle, on his shapely head a hackamore. Jake discarded bits during the cold weather. He wanted his horses to be comfortable. Nig and Joe were so well-trained that they seldom needed reining. A word would turn them or halt them.

"I wouldn't want a chunk of iron in my mouth to have to keep warmed up," Jake explained to Di. "So when it turns off cold no horse of mine is bothered with a bit. Treat your horses right, Di, and they'll serve you well."

From the back door of the cabin to the corner projected a shed room. Beneath this shelter was piled stove wood in orderly cords.

Dead trees that have seasoned in the air," Jack told Di, "make the best firewood. Cut 'em into splittin' lengths. When you hit a chunk of that kind of wood, it will go *twong*. That means it is sound stuff."

Between the shed and the cellar, or "root house," ran a shoulder-high line of sound chunks for the fireplace. Back of the line of chunks was a great pile of seasoned logs, ready for the saw and ax.

"Come what will," Jake told the children, "we're goin' to keep warm and snug this winter. We don't have to pinch down on wood."

For that matter they did not have to "pinch down" on anything. The cellar was piled to the ceiling with provisions. From a nearby pine hung the carcasses of two deer. On a stout shelf between the big cupboard and the cook stove a company of squat bottles stood at parade rest. In them was placer gold—about fifty ounces of the precious metal. Jake had struck one pocket out of which he had taken over thirty ounces in three days.

"Young'uns' luck," he called it.

The children were getting their foster-father ready for a ride to Dave Strong's place. Dave would return with him and help build the girls' room. Di brought his buffalo overcoat, cap and mittens. The girls brought him his heaviest boots, his overshoes and an extra pair of thick woolen socks. They would not permit him to touch those articles. They worked like little Trojans, pulling and tugging at the socks and boots, grunting in their struggle with the overshoes. To be of service to him was a great privilege. When he returned, they would pull off his overshoes and boots and scamper for his slippers. Di would take his overcoat, cap and mittens and put them away.

Now came Raldy with an old pipe. Jake's favorite pipe was in his pocket, but he thanked the little fellow elaborately and put the old discarded pipe into his pocket.

"I swear," he laughed, "I never would get started if I didn't have such good helpers. How I ever got along without you kids, I dunno.

"Now, Di, everything's in shape. You can fry some venison and taters for supper, and make some taffy if you want. Be sure and turn off the molasses barrel spout. You know how to get breakfast, and that beef pie I made yesterday will do for dinner tomorrow. Warm it up in the oven. Look out for fire and be careful with the lamps. I figger on gettin' back tomorrow night, with old Dave with me. I'm dependin' on you and Ruby, Di, to look after things. Anybody calls, invite them in and give them something to eat.

"Any of my friends, tell them to help themselves. Strangers, do the best you can for them. Tell them I'll be back in a little while. But," he added, with a laugh, "if you see anybody tryin' to carry off the Thunderin' Bar, just take down my biggest rifle, raise the window, shove it through and cut close enough to him to see how high he can jump. If he don't jump, cut a little closer."

He put on his shaggy overcoat and dropped to his knees. Each little girl gave him a hug and a kiss. Raldy kissed him and then drew back and stared at him fondly. Di pounded his back, the boy way

of showing love. They followed him out to Clipper, and waved as long as they could see him.

When Jake was out of sight of the Thundering Bar, he thought of singing. The song he had sung with such spirit in Mike's place, came to him once more.

"There's just three reasons why, I think—
Why a jigger wants a drink:
Because he's dry,
A pard is nigh,
Or—any other reason why!"

But he found himself unable to sing the refrain. Somehow the words brought him no happiness, nor did he care for the vision they prompted. In fact, the vision of the swimming-eyed men at the bar was very dim. It seemed to merge into a vision of children. Those faces near his own were not the flushed faces of pardners, they were the faces of the children—*his* children.

"That life," he told Clipper happily, "is all behind me. I had my fill, old horse. I raised hell for thirty years or more, and have no regrets. But I've got something better now. Move up, Clip. We can't fool along when we've five young'uns waitin' for us to get back."

Now certain small fears intruded. Maybe he should have taken the children over to Silver Creek and left them with the woman who did their sewing and washing for them. Di was as reliable as any man, but then something might happen. This was the first night he had been away from them since they came to him. Fully now he realized how tightly their little hands had gripped his heart.

"They have grown into me," he murmured, "become a part of me. Cripes, what a man has to pay for love! When it comes, always does it bring the dread of loss."

He was half-minded to return to them. Still, that was a foolish thought. They had plenty of wood, plenty of grub, and were wise little rascals. Di was reliable and dependable, with a man's mind under his shock of glinting hair. Ruby was a little mother to her sisters and Raldy. And there was no human being in the country who would harm a child. They were snug and safe enough.

But when he reached Bill Oak's cabin he was happily surprised. Dave was there, with his heavy rifle and a bundle of books.

VII

THE morning of the second of January, Di was up early. A man could not lie abed when there was work to do. Noiselessly he moved about the cabin, lest he awaken the girls and Little Raldy, snug and warm in the big bed back of the curtain. A man always let children sleep in the morning. With meticulous care he observed his foster father's admonitions concerning matches, lamps and fire.

Repressing the desire to give voice to the shivers the cold water roused, he washed his face and hands and combed his tangled locks. Then he drew on his overshoes and donned a high-collared, sheepskin-lined jacket that Jake had given him. A fur cap and thick mittens completed his comfortable garb. Milk bucket on arm, he extinguished the lamp and picked up the lantern. He stole out on tiptoe and closed the door softly.

At the barn, in imitation of Jake, he assured the horses and cows that it was, "a fine, large morning." He fed them liberally and milked the cow Jake had bought.

Hurrying back to the cabin, he strained the milk into crocks and set them in the lower part of the cupboard. He was unaware that two men, lurking back of the barn, had heard him talking to the horses. The plans of Mr. Bird Wippet were unknown to him. The great question before him now was what to have for breakfast. He decided that corn meal mush would be welcomed by all concerned.

Soon the stove was glowing, and the tea kettle singing. Now the girls and Little Raldy were stirring in their warm nest. Di, as he prepared the mush, smiled at Raldy's impatient grunts. The little rascal always grunted that way when the girls were dressing him. Presently he charged full-tilt into the kitchen, followed by his three little mothers. Di filled the wash basin with hot water. Girls and babies had to have warm water to wash in; they couldn't stand cold water. Men don't bother about such things, but girls and babies had to be cared for.

Ruby set the table, while Pearl scrubbed Raldy's face and hands and combed the tangles out of his linty hair.

Di dished out the mush, and warmed Raldy's milk. The children poured pure, rich cream over their mush. Little wonder they were plump and red-cheeked.

In the barn, Hairlip Pike and Scratchy Brown, two of Mr. Wippet's imported hirelings, considered the posting of the last location notice that would give their employer title to the eight placer claims that formed the Thundering Bar.

They had expected to jump the claims by moonlight, but a cloudy sky and a light fall of snow had brought such intense darkness that they had refused to risk life and limb in carrying out the plans of the clever little promoter.

"Wippet didn't say anything about a boy," said Pike. "Ender must be away, or the boy wouldn't be doin' the work."

"I don't know so much about that," growled Scratchy. "He may have the kid for to do the work while he snoozes." Scratchy measured the characters of other men by his own. Had he had a boy, he would have kicked him out in the morning made a slave of him.

"Guess we'd better go up to the cabin and see what's what," suggested Pike. "If Enders is asleep, or just gettin' up, we can say we're lost. That last claim won't make much diff'rence. Wippet has the whole she-bang quit-claimed over to him and location notices all ready to be recorded by a friend of his'n first thing this mornin'. Besides, he ain't done so well by us. Two hundred dollars apiece for this job ain't no money. I'm not goin' to take no chances on bein' plugged for two hundred dollars. We'll ask for directions and move on."

"What if he asks us to stay for breakfast?"

"We'll take a swig or two of coffee," replied Pike, "and let on we're in a hurry. I can tell you, if he's there, I'm goin' to be movin'. But if the kid is alone, we can take our own time. I'd pass up the whole layout right now, but for the other hundred and expense money we got comin' from Wippet. He'll be watchin' up there on the rim of the canyon, and he won't pay us off if we don't jump the claim the sluice is on. He's got an idee that it's the richest of the whole group. Recollect he said he wanted that special."

"We'll go ahead," grumbled Scratchy, "but I don't aim to do no dyin' for Wippet. I don't know why I went into this deal for peanut money and expenses to get out of the country, but here I be, and I s'pose I might as well go through with it."

Di, the fearless, received the two bullies with calm politeness. But the little girls and Raldy shrank back from them. Intuition told them that their two visitors were not to be trusted. Ruby shooed Raldy into the bedroom. Pearl and Opal slowly sulked after her.

"Shall I make you some coffee?" Di asked.

"Sure thing," grunted Pike. "And some o' that mush and milk would help out."

HIS little green eyes suddenly widened. He nudged Scratchy, and covertly jerked a stubby thumb at the squat bottles on the stout shelf.

"Purty gold you got there," he remarked to Di, with assumed casualness.

Di filled the coffee pot with water before he answered.

"That's what Daddy Jake got out of the Thundering Bar," he explained. "He could get out lots more than that, but we don't need it."

"You're purty young to be running this place alone, ain't you?"

"I guess so, but it won't be long. Daddy Jake will be back tonight. You can eat your mush now. There's plenty of cream in the pitcher there."

They drew up to the table and gobbled down what was left of the mush. Pike tilted the big pitcher and drank deeply of the cream.

"Good stuff that," he grunted, licking his harelip. Scratchy took a swig from the pitcher, and licked his scraggly mustache.

Di began to feel a vague antagonism toward the two. Daddy Jake did not act that way. Daddy Jake did not drink from the pitcher and lick his mustache. Daddy Jake always said that a visitor should wait to be invited before he touched anything. He had not invited these men to drink from the pitcher. If Daddy Jake caught them drinking from the pitcher, he would tell them to behave themselves. If they didn't behave themselves, Daddy Jake would make them.

The two drained the coffee pot, and shoved back their chairs.

Again Pike jerked his stubby thumb at the gold.

"Must be around a thousand dollars worth of the stuff," he said, ignoring Di. "We might as well fill our hands, since we're movin' out anyway. Needn't say anything to Wippet about it. Let him settle his own affairs."

"A good idee," agreed Scratchy, enthu-

siastically. "It'll make the job worth while."

But they underestimated the intelligence of the boy.

"You mustn't touch Daddy Jake's gold," he told them softly, but there was a glint of cold determination in his gray eyes. He backed toward the shelf. "You can't have it," he added valiantly. "I won't let you have it."

Pike heaved himself erect. Grinning mirthlessly, he thrust the boy aside. But Di was not the sort to submit tamely. Silently as a wolf, he flung himself at the bully, clawing and pounding. Scratchy began dropping the heavy bottles into his capacious coat pockets. Pike held Di off with one hand, and pocketed his share of the treasure.

The desperate boy, wild with rage at the abuse of his hospitality, snached up a chunk of wood from the box near the stove, and hurled it at Pike. The bully dodged, but the end of the billet scratched his jaw. In a sudden surge of rage, he swung his fist against the boy's cheek. Di went down as though struck with a sledge. The little girls, peering around the curtain, began crying. Raldy raised a doleful howl.

"We'll stick up the notice," grumbled Pike, "and hit the trail. Danged young wildcat, I just had to hit him. Come on. We'll split even when we get clear of this place."

They ran from the cabin, their pockets sagging with the weight of the gold, and headed for the boxed location notice.

Di was on his feet, lurching toward Jake's gun closet, when the two thieves reached the discovery notice. The claim-jumpers had noticed the closet, but had supposed it to be merely another cupboard. The boy's head was ringing and he could scarcely see, but he managed to drag the heaviest repeater to the window. With little whimpers of desperation, he raised the window and rested the rifle on the sill. Dropping to his knees, he aimed at the little dark figures near the sluice boxes and pulled the trigged, but no explosion followed. He had forgotten to load. With some difficulty he threw a shell into the barrel. This time the gun bellowed like a cannon. The recoil threw him back, but did not diminish his cold determination. He threw in another shell and pulled the trigger. His shoulder was numb, he was sick and faint, his face was bruised and bloody, but he was doing his best to defend the property of the man who loved and trusted him.

The little figures were now moving down the canyon. He swung the rifle, and fired rapidly. He could see his bullets raise spurts of snow.

"Ender's slipped back!" panted Scratchy..

But Pike only wheezed, being solely concerned with throwing his feet.

Di had no idea of the wild panic in the hearts of Hairlip Pike and Scratchy Brown. Nor did he know that Bird T. Wippet and Tricky Trimmer, watching the field of operations from the rim of the canyon, were now on their way. They had seen the lantern bobbing to and from the barn, and had supposed the big prospector was at home. They could not understand why Pike and Scratchy would have so little sense as to put up a notice under the very nose of Jake Ender.

"Crazy fools," panted Wippet, as he wallowed through the snow toward his team. Ender'll follow us now. It means a killing—it means a killing."

Tricky Trimmer threw his long shanks with wild abandonment. What a fool he had been to permit Wippet to intimidate, to force him into this terrible situation. Ender would kill them all. He recalled Bird's remark about "hunks of chilled lead in warm, quivering, purple, personal in-test-tines."

He would fall in the merciless snow, kick a little and then no more would Peter Trimmer walk the earth. And there were so many things he could do, if permitted to live. Still, there might be a chance. He flung himself forward, throwing snow like a galloping ostrich. He was soon far ahead of the short-legged Wippet. He thanked his lucky stars now that he was thinly dressed. He had envied Wippet his wolfskin overcoat and felt boots, but now the little red hog's encumbering garb was an invitation to a funeral.

Shooting! Shooting! Shooting! The blasts of the heavy gun evoked from the pines long, lingering reverberations that made Wippet and Tricky strain for more speed.

SO INTENT were they on throwing their feet clear of the snow that they did not see the three horsemen circling through the pines. Suddenly there came the withering crack of a rifle from the pines at Tricky's left. Snow whiffed up a few feet ahead of him.

That was not right, he thought. It was dangerous to shoot so close to a man. Again the snow whiffed up in front of him. It dawned on him that the sensible thing to do was to halt. Mr. Wippet also favored the idea of halting. He was armed with a sixshooter, but in no mood to lead a forlorn hope. Three riders rode out from the pines, Jake, Dave Strong and Bill Oak. Dave was responsible for the spurts of snow that had halted Tricky. The three prospectors had witnessed Di's defense of the Thundering Bar, and had circled to cut off the retreat of the two schemers.

Mr. Wippet was not without a certain gameness. Now that he was caught, he resolved to lay his cards on the table. The claims had been jumped and recorded. He held the high cards. Enders would not dare to shoot him down in cold blood. He would bargain with the prospector. He would return him a fifth interest for the sake of peace.

He would get rid of Tricky and give Ender the interest he had promised the jackleg lawyer. Tricky did not know that his name had been omitted from one of the quit-claim deeds Pike and Scratchy had signed. Mr. Wippet had made out two deeds, one to show to Tricky and one to be recorded. Always a thoughtful little man, Bird, when it come to looking out for himself.

"Move along, you two," snarled Jake. "You're goin' to my cabin. We'll hear what my boy has to say about this affair. Bill, you stick with this pair, and me and Dave will see what them runners have to say."

Easily the two prospectors followed the trail of their captives to the team sequestered amid some jackpines. There they waited for the fleeing Pike and Scratchy.

"We'll let 'em get close," planned Jake, as the two claim-jumpers came out of the canyon and slogged toward them. "If they make a false move, plug 'em. I figger they were tryin' to jump my claims and Di opened on them with my forty-five seventy. I'd know the beller of that old gun anywhere."

It was plain to the prospectors that the two men approaching them were close to exhaustion. They stumbled frequently, and their movements were slow and clumsy.

Dave cocked his rifle. Jake drew his six-shooter and pressed the hammer back. The two thieves could not see them, and Wippet and Tricky, guarded by Bill Oak, were not yet visible from the road. Pike was within twenty paces of the wagon ere he saw the two prospectors.

"Hands up!" yelled Dave Strong. Pike thought of reaching for his six-shooter, but promptly changed his mind. There was something in the voice of the man with the rifle that told of sudden death. He elevated his paws. Scratchy followed suit.

"I'll search 'em for guns," Jake told Dave. "You keep the iron on 'em. If they get funny, let 'em have it."

"Well, well," commented the king of the Thundering Bar when he found his gold in the pockets of the two bullies. "You boys have been havin' a good time while I was away. He relieved them of their weapons. "You can carry the dust back."

Bill Oak came up with the panting Wippet and the wild-eyed Tricky.

"What you want done with these two, Jake?" he asked pleasantly. "Seems to me we better knock 'em on the head and leave 'em lay."

Jake stared at Tricky. Where had he seen that graveyard face before? Oh, yes; this was the jackleg lawyer whose shirt he had snatched out ages ago.

"Get in your wagon," he ordered the four. "Head for my cabin. Make any breaks and we'll make a hearse out of it."

Jake seemed pleasant enough, but Tricky sensed a certain deadliness about the big prospector. He was half-frozen outwardly and now he felt a spiritual chill. Mr. Wippet, however, was nursing his bluff. When they reached the cabin, he would make his play. He would show Ender that he held the high cards, and that brute force would accomplish—well, nothing, simply nothing.

Jake rode ahead. The children came from the cabin. Di, trembling and shaking from the strain of battle, lurched into his foster father's arms.

"What's the matter with your cheek, son?"

"That man hit me and took your gold," quavered the boy, pointing at Pike. "Oh, Daddy Jake, I tried to stop him, but I was no good. I wasn't strong enough. I hit him with a stick of wood and he hit me and everything got dark, 'n' then I got your rifle 'n' shot 'n' shot 'n' shot! They were doing something to the discovery notice down there."

"A game little man you be, Di, my boy. I'll get you a watch and a silver-mounted rifle for this. Now take the children in the house, and have Ruby wash your face and put some salve on it. Close the window."

He turned to Bill Oak as the children scampered away.

"Ride down to that notice by the sluice and see if these fellers have jumped my claims." Then, "And, Dave, while Bill is gettin' the news, we'll take our friends down to the barn, and have a talk with them."

Relieving Pike and Scratchy of the gold, he set the squat bottles in the snow.

"Turn that team, you little red-headed squirt, and drive down to my barn!" he roared at Mr. Wippet. "When you get there, get down. We're goin' to have a heart to heart talk."

Bill Oak returned with the new location notices.

"They jumped 'em all right," he reported. "Looks kinda bad, Jake, with your assessment not done."

Mr. Wippet descended from the wagon. Now was the time to launch his bluff.

"Ender, you might as well know now that I hold the high cards," he said calmly enough. "These two men are within the law. You failed to do your assessment work, and they located the claims. They have given me a quit-claim deed to the property, and the same, together with the location notices, is duly recorded before now. But I want to be fair with you. Let by-gones be by-gones, and I'll give you a fifth interest in the property. I'll put in a hydraulic, and make you more money than you ever heard of. As for these two men taking your gold, I'm not responsible for that. You saw I had no part in that matter."

"You're a kind-hearted little man," smiled Jake, but his eyes were cold. "I'll think over your proposition, but before I give it much thought, I want to talk with this hair-lipped gorilla here. Come on, you, into the barn with me."

Pike was young and far above the average in strength, but a child in the grip of the mighty Jake. The prospector's iron fingers closed about his wrist. He attempted some resistance against Jake's two hundred and forty pounds of bone and muscle, but was jerked from his feet as though he were a straw-stuffed dummy.

Pike was a tough bird but what Jake gave him took all the toughness out of him. It was a plain spanking with a pickhandle. He struggled, but remorselessly the pickhandle smacked against his back. Terrible blows that soon brought the whimper of surrender from him. But Jake was not satisfied. When he had administered the frightful spanking, he placed the bully exactly where he wanted him and drove a sledge hammer fist against his jaw. It was a perfect knockout. He came from the barn, dragging the plug-ugly as he would a dead hog.

"We'll load this meat," he told his friends, "after I finish up the rest. I gave him a little extra, on account of him hittin' my boy."

Mr. Wippet was tempted to run, but the cold gaze of Dave Strong was upon him, and he was afraid even to bat an eye. Tricky was almost ready to swoon. Scratchy's frazzly mustache was twitching. He glanced about him wildly, but could see no avenue of escape. Better to endure a pickhandle whacking than be shot down.

Jake jerked Scratchy off his feet, seized him by the leg and dragged him into the barn. There was something humorous about his taking the claim-jumper into the stable. He had the air of a father taking his bad boy to the woodshed.

Mr. Wippet felt a great nausea overwhelm him. An awful bawling issued from the barn. Smack! Smack! Smack! Deep groans from the innermost depths of Scratchy's being, and lastly the thin whine of abject surrender. Jake returned, dragging spankee Number Two by the leg.

"There's one little gentleman," he remarked, "who'll take his grub standin' up for quite a spell. And now, little, cute redhead with them scrub bull curls, you're next. Come with papa."

Mr. Wippet only stared. He tried to speak, but only steam issued from his lips.

Jake stripped off the little man's overcoat as a farm boy husks an ear of corn, seized his wrist and jerked him from his feet. Mr. Wippet began a frantic squealing. There is something in the claim that every man resembles some animal. Bird T. Wippet was a little red boar.

His squealing was continuous, like a pig caught under a gate. At the first whack, his squeal rose to a piercing intensity. It sawed raggedly through Tricky Trimmer's frozen soul. He was next.

Jake worked Mr. Wippet over thoroughly. He gave every vertebra individual treatment, and added several whacks to make sure he hadn't overlooked any tender spots. At last the thin whimper.

Jake deposited Mr. Wippet with his col-

lection of spankees. Mr. Trimmer, at the prospector's growled order, followed him into the stable like a hypnotized half-wit.

"Get off that overcoat," commanded Jake. Tricky tried to obey, but the strength was gone from his hands. The prospector tore the garment from the jackleg's bony frame.

"Don't, Mr. Ender," chattered the fearful trickster. "Please don't."

BUT there was no mercy in Jake's heart. These men had jumped his claims and struck at the welfare of his children. This jackleg lawyer had gone through life without receiving a sound beating. Such men always dodged a beating. But this one was going to remember the second day of January. He would impress on him that there was no profit or pleasure in trying to steal what an honest man possessed.

He grabbed Tricky's arm and slammed him down on the stable floor. Tricky tried to keep his back on the floor, but Jake turned him over. *Whack! Whack! Whack!* Shrill yells.

"You sound like a woman," grunted Jake. "I swear, if you didn't have whiskers, I'd think I was beatin' a squaw. Turn over there." *Whack! Whack! Whack!*

"I'm sorry," screamed Tricky. "I'll make amends! I had nothing to do with it!"

Jake finished up with what to him were a few light whacks. However, they stuck Tricky's undergarments to his flesh. The prospector dragged the whimpering jackleg into the sunlight.

"Now, Dave, if you and Bill will help me load this stuff, we'll soon be shut of it and turn our thoughts to pleasanter things."

They threw the half-conscious Pike into the wagon as they would a beef carcass. Jake set Mr. Whippet on the seat as he might a trick monkey. Scratchy and Tricky were heaved up as though they were sacks of meal. Jake tossed Wippet's and Tricky's overcoats into the wagon, placed the lines in the little promoter's helpless hands and turned the team.

"Good-by, and don't come back," he roared. "Tell everybody in Driftwood what Jake Ender gave you for a New Year's gift."

"But, Jake," remonstrated Dave Strong, "you're lettin' those jumpers go without signin' your claims back to you. Better make them come back. We can take them over to Silver Creek, and make 'em sign up before old Judge Gary. What say I stop 'em?"

Jake waved a huge hand carelessly.

"Oh, they didn't do me any harm, barrin' hittin' Di," he grinned. "When I was down to the railroad, I thought, bein' that I had a family, I'd better start gettin' an A-1 title to the Thunderin' Bar. So I slapped a homestead filin' on it. That means a mile of placer, all snug and tight under a homestead filin'. On top of that I relocated the claims in Di's name two months ago, but didn't get to stick up the notices. When those gents look up the records, they'll find that Di Ender, my adopted son, has the mineral rights and Paw Jake, the homestead rights. If that don't hold the Thunderin' Bar, prayer won't."

Dave laughed softly.

"Having a family makes a man farsighted, Jake. Well, let's have a look at your babies."

VIII

THE canyon of the Thundering Bar lay a-dream in the sunlight of radiant June. Above the murmur of the pines and the subdued laughter of the stream rose the clear, sweet voices of the children. They had been gathering violets and shooting stars in the shady dells. Now they were straying from a sarvis berry thicket, their lips stained with juice. The girls had woven garlands for their glinting hair. Raldy, full of berries, looked like some jovial little Comus, with his garland of flowers and his juice-stained face.

Di smiled at him indulgently. The quiet lad was supremely happy. This was their canyon, this their world—their beautiful, clean, healthy world.

Jake was shoveling into the sluice with his rhythmic swing. *Clunk!* and the shovel hit the board and turned. *Swis-s-sh!* and the impatient, hungry sluice mouthed the gravel, tasted it lingeringly, ejected the worthless and retained the gold in its riffles.

Jake paused in his work, and looked about him in lordly fashion. His domain, his—all his. He emitted a vast sigh of content. Then came a vision of the lights of Old Drift to ruffle his calm. A long,

long time since he had roared his way through a red night in that camp. A long, long time since he had bellowed his impromptu ditties in Mike's place.

He closed his eyes. What was that ditty he had sung so long ago? Ah, yes—he remembered now. Leaning on his shovel handle, he sang softly:

"There's just three reasons why, I think—
Why a jigger wants a drink:
Because he's dry,
A pard is nigh,
Or—any other reason why!

So line 'em up an' drink——"

But he could not finish the refrain. The far, faint laughter of the children silenced him. He opened his eyes. There they were, wading the crystal stream, calling sweetly to him. Soon Di would be shoveling into the sluice at his side, soon Little Raldy would be spooning gravel with his tiny wooden shovel, soon the girls would be making playhouses of sticks and stones.

He shook his great head and heaved a sigh for the passing of the wild, reckless days. No more the red nights, no more the reckless jamborees.

But there was a recompense that more than paid for the loss of his old freedom.

"I stand winner," he murmured happily, "winner a thousand times over."

But the song? He smiled half-humorously, his eyes warm with sentiment. There were plenty of other songs, rich in happiness as the Thundering Bar in gold. Already one had formed in his mind. While the children scampered toward him, he threw back his head and in pipe-organ bass boomed forth:

"I do not care for what is gone,
For love has come and found me;
As long as this old heart beats on,
I'll have my babes around me.

Now wash the gold, sweet stream, and sing,
Good-by to drunk and bender;
For love has made a first-class saint
Of wicked old Jake Ender."

EXPLOSIVE GOLD

By ARTHUR WOODWARD

IT WAS in the early part of March, 1847, shortly after the Battle of Buena Vista that a supply train bearing some forage and munitions for its escort, set out for the town of Camargo, the chief depot of supplies at the time, from General Taylor's camp on the battlefield.

Accompanying the train was the usual escort of cavalry and infantry composed of Ohio volunteers and Kentucky riflemen. The country was infested with roving bands of guerrilla lancers who made life miserable for slow baggage trains.

Nearing the town of Cerrallo scouts brought word that large bodies of lancers were in evidence on either side of the road ahead but before the officer in command of the detachment could concentrate his men the Mexicans launched an attack upon the center of the train, cutting off the rear guard and preventing it from assisting the feeble force of men in the center in holding off the Mexican troopers.

As intimated, the wagons bore many different brands of supplies. Now it so happened that the specie used in paying off the troops was packed in boxes similar in shape, size and color to those carrying ammunition for muskets and pistols.

One of the forty wagons of the central portion of the train that was cut out by the guerrillas was loaded with such boxes. These vehicles were immediately driven out of the road into the thickets where an eager throng of looters swarmed over them. In so doing one lancer discovered the boxes of "gold."

"Mirad! Mirad!" he shouted. "Look. Look. *Dinero.* Money, money!"

In an instant the gang had all gathered about that wagon, failing to note in their anxiety to unload the precious money that some of the boxes had opened and the wagon bed was covered with shiny black grains.

It was presumed by the Americans who examined the scene a few minutes later that some hasty caballero had left his ever present, lighted *cigarillo* fall from his lips and when the "gold" blew up it scattered the remains of some thirty of the lancers over the surrounding landscape.

As might be expected, the word was passed among the Mexicans, so the *Yengoes* learned later, that the accursed Gringoes had allowed that particular wagon to be captured because it was nothing more nor less than an infernal machine. It was decidedly unsportsmanlike and to show their resentment they left the train strictly alone for the rest of the journey.

THE DESERT

-BY- BEN A. MILLER

WHEN you've once seen the long, low-stretchin' desert:
The scraggy sage, the choya-whitened dunes,
The tall saguaros, keepin' watch forever,
Like Injun-ghosts beneath the silent moon,
You savvy, pard, the meanin' of the wasteland.
For when them barren sand-hills voice their call,
Their promise, half of death and half of fortune,
Jest makes you chance it—winner takin' all!

There's rattlesnakes, horned-toads, and lots of lizards,
But further on no livin' thing has trod,
An' there it seems, there's only God an' Silence,
An' lots of hell—and then some more of God!
But always far above there is a watcher;
You never think he is so near at hand
Until you're weak an' tired an' start to stagger,
An' then the buzzard's shadder blots the sand.

You lift your eyes and see a burned-out mountain,
It fades and shimmers in the scorching heat;
It's gone! An' where it was there's ships a-sailin',
An trees, an' lakes of water cool and sweet!
The picture fades—and there's the burned-out mountain,
It's near—then far! It sorter seems to dodge!
Again you see the ships an' lakes an' rivers:
The hauntin' beauty of the grim mirage!

Your canteen dry, you start to watch the burro,
An' where he stops an' paws you dig—an' pray
The water seeps, fer if it ain't plumb poison
You have the hope of mebbe one more day!
An' then, when dang near dead, you struggle homeward,
A-cussin' ev'ry rock-vein in your road;
An' like as not, you'll kick one, jes' fer meanness,
To find it quartz! A million-dollar lode!

An' that's the desert, pard, jest hell an' beauty!
Its dim mirages an' its dust-storms dance,
An' hide the grinnin' skulls of them as found it
The greatest gamble an' the last, long chance!
It is the land where there is no tomorrow;
Where yesterday can't be remembered—well,
The land of silent death and golden promise,
Which grimly threatens with a slow farewell.

DAYONG GETS MISLAID

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Author of "State's Evidence," "The Ten Missing Enfields," etc.

Until the last moment Dayong was confident that his chief, Bruce Romney, of the Burma Secret Service, would come to the rescue—but at last death loomed and even faithful Dayong gave up hope.

A BABU stood leaning with an air of intense concentration over the guard rail of the outdoor hippo tank in the park of Rangoon's zoo. He was being watched with equal concentration by Bruce Romney, inspector in the Burma Secret Service, who stood under the shade of a clump of blue bamboos a short distance down the path. For Bruce had an urgent message from Dayong Vila, his native assistant, that might concern this one.

The babu, like all the Hindoo pettifoggers of his caste, was intensely curious, greedy for Western knowledge. He studied absorbedly the baby hippo disporting himself within the enclosure. His swarthy face, under a black polo cap embroidered with gold, was furrowed with thought. His slim body, in tight cotton jacket and flowery skirt, twisted and swayed as the babu's bulgy eyes traveled alternately from the live baby hippo in the tank to the bleached skull of a full-grown one hanging in a shade tree over it. The zoo had hung it there to show what the hippo would be like when full grown, for they had no adult specimen; but it was causing the babu much intense thought.

Bruce wondered what he was making of it, and moved up alongside the fence. The babu turned to him, thirsty for information.

"Sahib, please," he asked, "did it really shed that skull?"

Bruce stifled forcibly the whoop of merriment that arose.

"Quite. Like the deer, y'know," he then answered gravely.

"Thanks, sar," said the babu, satisfied; and went on to examine the bear-cat's cage. Bruce hastened to hide himself in the bamboos, where he laughed till he choked.

"The blighter!" he gasped, wiping the tears from his eyes. What creatures of theories based on half-remembered facts some babus were! Blind, even when a fact stared them in the face so long as it failed to fit in with the theory—yet the babus furnished many of the *swaraj* agitators in India. This one, for instance, with his priceless skull theory based on a hazy recollection that deer *did* shed their antlers; he was perfectly satisfied in spite of the obvious fact that that skull was as big as the entire baby hippo!

Surely this credulous simpleton couldn't be the babu of Dayong's message and the Calcutta cablegram! thought Bruce as his gray eyes sought the man again. The wire said:

Babu Bugwan Dass dangerous agitator escaped on SS Poona *tonight. Look out.*

The India Secret Service had also wirelessed the *Poona's* officers at sea and they had done their best, but who can pick out one disguised babu among two thousand skinny rice-coolies? Bruce and Dayong Vila, his native assistant who was known on the books as S.1046, had done their best, too, when the *Poona* docked. It was exasperating, that inspection! If the babu had only been a trifle fat, as most of them were! But the shipload of coolies was, like the three negroes, Crambo, Mumbo and Jumbo—"all berry much alike, especially Jumbo." And the pestilent babu, notorious as a *swaraj* agitator in Calcutta, had got loose in Burma.

Bruce was not long in hearing about him. Rumors vapored up out of the bazaars of a great Hindoo Buddhist who was preaching mighty words in the *kyaungs*, monasteries, of Rangoon. Bruce wanted keenly to know what the mighty words were, so he sent Dayong, disguised as a Buddhist *pyit-shin*, disciple, around the monasteries to see and hear the preacher and let him know what he looked like and what sort of doctrine he was preaching. Bruce had had some priceless messages from Dayong at the seat of war. He treasured the following:

I here with much glad. Therefore with humble begging that you no can do regressions. Without hesitation I beg to have a pause. Dayong.

It was written on a strip of talipot palm leaf, the crude letters scratched with a steel stylus. That argued that Dayong had access to the pongyi's writing materials, was perhaps a sort of secretary for the Babu Bugwan Dass already, since he knew Hindustani. He seemed to be getting on well. The "regressions" part of it meant that he was not to be recalled just yet.

This morning had come another message. Brief and enigmatical it was:

Rangoon Zoo. Seven o'clock. Must be.

Bruce had come to the zoo expecting both their babu and Dayong, the latter perhaps having evidence valid for his summary arrest. A crisis of some sort had arrived, he was sure. But there was only this ass of the hippo skull—no Dayong.

BRUCE followed the park lanes under Nicobar palms and enormous banyans to a bench commanding the zoo gate, where he could watch for Dayong and another babu. He laid his white topee on the bench, exposing his thick black locks to the fresh monsoon breeze. He threw open his khaki Norfolk jacket; the cool morning air felt good on his bare knees and his sunburned thighs in the loose khaki running shorts. His swagger-stick tapped idly against his golf hose as he watched alternately the gate and that wandering babu, now studying the cages of mewing leopards, complaining tigers, whooping Burma gibbons. He *could* not believe that that simpleton could be the notorious agitator, Bugwan Dass!

The park was already full of gay Burmese, little ladies like walking flowers with their gossamer scarfs blowing out before them in two wisps of color, laughing Burmans in silken skirts and jackets and headgear and carrying parasols that were luminous discs of color. Hindoos seldom came here. Bruce wondered why even this babu should be visiting the zoo. Certainly not to look at the animals. To meet someone, exchange a message with some pongyi? He could swear that the babu was never near any of the three yellow robed priests that had entered. And of Dayong and the really important babu of the Calcutta cable, not a sign.

Bruce was worried. There had been a miscarriage somewhere. And, as the only babu who had come was now hurrying out the gate, he got up and followed.

Up along Victoria Road and past the cantonments of the European troops on the hill the babu hurried, his slender skirted figure reminding Bruce of those terrible styles of the nineties when ladies dressed like emaciated hatracks. He crossed Ahlone Road presently, the massive golden pagoda of Shwe Dagôn rising high out of its hill of greenery to the left and piercing the brazen blue of the sky. The babu kept on, under the shade now of the great trees that overhung the Pongyi Kyaung Daik, the head monastery of the priests of Shwe Dagôn itself.

Bruce closed up, his heart quickening. Was he going in there? If so, this had really been his man—and where was Dayong all this time? It was intensely exasperating! Without Dayong and some tangible written evidence, it would have been

impossible, anyhow, to arrest this babu. A ripe plot of Dayong's to nab him at the zoo had evidently fizzled out.

Bruce watched the babu turn in at the gate in the compound wall that enclosed the monastery and stamped his foot with vexation. That babu *was* Bugwan Dass, and he had not been able to lay a finger on him! He noted long lines of gharries parked under the shade of the trees. Some Buddhist ceremony downtown was evidently coming off this day and the whole monastery was going to it—in closed gharries of course. They would march back to this *kyaung* with the image, or relic, or whatever it was.

The air of a crisis hung over all this thing. Dayong was in that monastery, in the thick of it. The babu had brought about some sort of climax to his preachings here. Dayong had got him over to the Zoo on some pretext, right at the apex of things, but had missed out himself, somehow. Aggravating!

Bruce had hardly got back to his office in the big police building on Phayre Street before the purpose of the gharries was explained. The telephone rang.

"Derwent talking, old chap. I say, rum show starting down here! Thought you might like to see it. Meet me on Sule Pagoda Wharf."

"Thanks so much, Derwent! Five minutes. So long."

Bruce's keen gray eyes snapped with excitement. Things were coming to a head!

DOWN on the wharf he met Derwent, the freightmaster. A life size bronze Buddha had already been taken out of its crate and was being transferred to a gaudy litter of red and gold by four strong coolies. Bruce took notes. The Buddha was weathered green in color, sitting cross-legged in the conventional attitude, his right hand in his lap holding a lotus flower of carved moonstone, his left curled over his knee. His eyes were closed, and on his calm face played the enigmatical smile of one who has attained to supreme wisdom. His head was crowned with the usual cap of naga scales and had a huge ruby glowing in the peak of the crown.

"Consigned to us from Calcutta," said Derwent. "The pongyis have come for it, y'see, and there'll be no end of a parade."

"From Calcutta?" echoed Bruce, "most unusual, what? There's no love lost between the Buddhists of India and ours in Burma!"

"Thought you'd like to know!" said Derwent. "Here's the shippers' address in Calicut, if you like. Hindoo firm that I never heard of before."

Bruce felt that the subtle hand of Bugwan Dass was in it, and would have liked to warn the pongyis to beware of Greeks bearing gifts. Instead he wired Darwood, of the India Secret Service in Calcutta, to trace up that Buddha.

When he got out into the streets again the parade was already passing up China Street. It was headed by four naked blacks garlanded with jasmine flowers, who danced a complicated shuffle across and across China Street playing on small flutes. After them marched a tall coolie carrying a seven-storied chandelier glittering with flashing crystals; and then a Burmese band playing "K-k-katy" vigorously and all out of tune.

Followed a long line of yellow-robed pongyis, their shaven heads shaded by fans. Then an equally long double file of novices, yellow-robed, with stiff bootbrushes of black hair, not having yet attained to the holiness of a shave. Bruce looked in vain for Dayong among them. He clicked his teeth with worry. Dayong was in trouble, recognized perhaps, and now a prisoner up in the Pongyi Kyaung Daik.

On the red and gold litter carried by four struggling coolies came next the bronze Buddha, moving in triumph. Behind him tottered two venerable sawdaws, high priests in the white robes of those who have nearly attained to Nirvana. And then the abbot of the monastery, a stern and shaven fanatic with a long scrawny neck hooking up from his yellow cowl like the neck of a vulture. With him was stepping out the great Hindoo babu, Bugwan Dass—and he was none other than Bruce's imbecile of the zoo.

The blighter!" muttered Bruce. "Daren't touch him now, and he knows it. Horrible sacrilege to take him out of this religious procession! Besides, without Dayong, we have no proof of anything against him. If Dayong had only been there this morning, confound him! I lay a quid he'd intended to!"

He saw the parade as far as the foot of Pagoda Road. The gleaming golden shaft of Shwe Dagôn rose hazily into the blue at the far end of it, a long distance, two miles yet. Bruce did not care to walk that

far in the hot Rangoon sun; besides he was consumed with anxiety over Dayong. He hurried back to his office expecting a message.

There was one, a bit of palm leaf strip, and on it was scratched this pathetic appeal:

I am loosing humble life here. Shwe Dagôn. Moon. If not having honorable assistance. Dayong.

Bruce snorted, scratched the curly black hair that was baldish and streaked with gray over his temples, and went into action immediately.

"Shwe Dagôn. Moon." That was to be the time and the place of his execution. He had evidently been recognized, exposed somehow, in the monastery. The Buddhists would not kill him because of their religion, but Bugwan Dass would find a way to, once he knew that Dayong was an agent of the hated Secret Service! But how get into the sacred precincts of Shwe Dagôn? It was forbidden to all white men, even to the Prince of Wales when he was in Rangoon on a royal visit. Four long staircases led up to the Great Golden Pagoda, each guarded day and night by a pongyi You could not force an entrance; it would cause no end of a religious row!

Bruce conjectured that the bronze Buddha would be installed there, in one of the hundreds of shrines around the base of the pagoda. It would be done secretly, in the dark of this night; and next day the presence of the image would be proclaimed to the worshippers as a miracle by the pongyis. Shwe Dagôn was crowded with miraculous *tis* and images, votive offerings from wealthy princes all over the East. The temple was worth thirteen million dollars. When the moon came up, there would be installation rites on that lonely platform —with Dayong as a victim or a sacrifice, somehow. Trust Bugwan Dass for that! Nor could Bruce rescue him by force.

DAYONG had indeed been having a rather dark-brown time of it. At first it had been easy for him to enter the Lammadaw Kyaung, presenting himself as a candidate for novice. He was given a yellow robe, accustomed himself to the dim dark interior with its rows of tall teak columns, its niches, its huge white plaster image of the Buddha occupying all one end of the monastery. Dayong listened to doctrine, joined the novices in the evening lauds. And that night he was rewarded by seeing the visiting babu enter accompanied by the head pongyi.

Dayong eyed the Bengali with disfavor. "'Im 'e cheap-pidgin feller," he commented on the babu's external characteristics.

He listened while the head pongyi introduced the Rao Bugwan Dass, lama of the Buddhists in India, and the babu began a discourse. Of all the hazy, obscure, unintelligible, distorted and ambiguous expositions of the Buddhist creed, hopelessly garbled with Brahminism, that Dayong had ever heard, that was the pinnacle! Nebulous talk about the all-in-all of the all-pervadingness; everything, the good and the bad, the fine and the base, creeds and the lack of them, all coming to the same thing in the end, for they were all but manifestations of the same One.

" 'Im 'e wuzzy-wuzzy!" commented Dayong as the flow of high-pitched Hindustani went on.

The babu could see by the stony faces that he was not getting anywhere with these austere pongyis and soon shifted to the grievances of the Buddhists in India. They had a thousand thousand of them, all due to the white oppressors, who would soon be thrown out of the country and back across the sea whence they came. Still a listless silence, only Dayong listening intently. The pongyis hadn't any grievances here.

Then the babu changed subtly. His keynote now was power, a thing that no body of men gets enough of. He spoke of the recent edict forbidding all white persons to enter kyaungs and pagoda temples. The British Government had allowed that, to spare the Buddhists the annoyance of gaping tourists in their holy places, but Bugwan Dass was careful to point out that it was granted because the British Raj was afraid of the pongyis. It had but few troops in Burma; it *dared* not refuse any reasonable request.

There were murmurs of interest at that. Everyone was thinking what else they might want—and the babu was prompt with his suggestion. We should demand a greater share in the government, he cried, as in the old days of the Burmese kings!

He touched the right note there. Growls of assent answered him. The old sawdaws remembered the times when the priest's

word was law, when pongyis managed the Throne itself, behind the scenes. The younger men were eager to get that power back. *There* was a grievance indeed! Bugwan Dass spoke on, the whole monastery with him. The British Raj, he vociferated, ignored their power. And why? Because the English were selfish, as in India, wanted the whole country for themselves and cared nothing for the people. And who was closer to the life of the people than the yellow-robed pongyi?

He did not point out the obvious fact that the British Raj gave no church any special power, Mohammedan, Brahmin, Buddhist, nor Christian. He kept before them the point that the pongyis taught all the schools, that Burma was the most literate country in the world, eighty-seven per cent. of its boys knowing how to read and write, and that all that was needed now was to demand the vote for them—and right soon the pongyis would control all the power of the government!

Bugwan Dass had won. He had given them a new idea to work on, and he was sent up in triumph to the Kyaung Daik of Shwe Dagôn to preach the new idea there. And Dayong, as his most ardent disciple, went along.

Dayong squatted on his hams, Malay-fashion, in the niche that had been allotted him as the babu's secretary, considering. To him as a Malay and a wanderer who had seen much of life, all this talk of ruling by the many was "wuzzy-wuzzy." The many were fools; they knew nothing of government and would simply vote as the pongyis told them. Give him a sultan! One with a strong sword! And that sultan was the British Raj, a benign and beneficent sultan, as anyone could see. Therefore this babu with his pestiferous idea was a trouble maker and a dangerous agitator, even as Tuan Bruce had said. The thing to do was to get him out of the kyaung alone, somehow, and with some written evidence of sedition upon him. Then he and Tuan Bruce could arrest the foolish babu.

Dayong noticed a pongyi looking at him blackly from an alcove and made haste to cross his legs in the attitude of the Buddha and go on with his work. He belabored himself mildly for forgetting that the comfortable Malay squat was dangerous here. It irked him, this cross-legged posture of the infidels; the other was natural, and he could not help relaxing into it sometimes. However, things were coming along. The babu was going to dictate a pronunciamento, soon, to be sent out to all the forty thousand monasteries of Burma. Then it was that Dayong took steel stylus and a strip of palm leaf from his writing materials and wrote his "with much glad" message to Tuan Bruce. He rubbed over the scratches with an ink rag, bringing out the writing sharp and distinct, folded it into a packet, tied it with a bit of leaf strip, and went out to throw it over the compound wall where his shop boy would find it. Thus simply had they arranged the details of communication.

He had hardly got back before the babu entered the niche. He was puffed up with importance now, breathing heavily with the profundity of his thoughts, his black eyes with their yellow whites staring as those of a seer.

"Take stylus and write, disciple!" he said grandiloquently. "I, the Rao Bugwan Dass, lama of the temple which is in Mindnapur, do call on all Monasteries of the Way in Burma to rise against the oppressor! Put that in Burmese, disciple."

Dayong scratched the round curlicue Burmese characters on the fine-ribbed talipot palm leaf. He looked up at the babu inquiringly.

"Too long have the faithful remained inert! Since the days of the kings, when has any pongyi had a voice in the government?" Followed a turgid diatribe against the British Raj, the gist of which was a command for all monasteries throughout Burma to unite in demanding the vote.

Dayong hummed with unholy glee as he wrote. If the babu had simply confined himself to the vote he would have been perfectly safe, for there was no sedition in that.

But he simply could not keep the *swaraj* jargon out of it, incendiary and treasonable talk that no government would tolerate. The pronunciamento took four long strips to set forth; when Bugwan Dass had signed it, Dayong did the strips together into a booklet, an enigmatical smile playing across his hard Malay features. He had the babu now! Remained a way to get him out of the kyaung, just once, and as soon as possible.

The babu, having got that weighty matter out of his system, was in a mood for conversation. He liked this disciple who could talk Hindustani. The language difficulty had barred him from much discourse with the pongyis. Dayong considered the innate curiosity of all babus, their greed for miscellaneous knowledge, and thought upon how he could make this foible profit-

able. Well, aside from the sea, natural history was the subject that he was most up on. Babus were generally interested in that, too, because most sahibs were, and it gave them excuse to air their learning when talking with sahibs.

Then Dayong had a gorgeous idea. He bethought him of that baby hippo in the zoo and the skull of a full-grown one hanging in the tree over his tank. Why not challenge the babu's grasshopper mind with that? He led the conversation artfully around to animals, and from that to the habit of some of them of shedding their antlers.

The hippo sheds his skull, you know," said Dayong casually, in corroboration.

"Sheds his *skull!*" The babu gasped. "But how can an animal lose his head and live, disciple?" he demanded.

"Nay, quite easily! He grows a new one underneath, as does the snake," retorted Dayong.

Nothing would do but the babu must see that marvel to believe it! Dayong had but to mention the evidence, right here in the Rangoon Zoo, and he had him. That night it was that he had sent off the "must be" message to Tuan Bruce.

BUT Dayong was due for an unpleasant surprise next morning. He was going out the gate with Bugwan Dass—with the damning pronunciamento in his pocket and everything set for an arrest—when the two novices on guard stopped him peremptorily.

"Pass, Rao Bugwan Dass—but not the novice!" they said.

The babu protested.

"Most interesting naturalistic phenomenons," he explained, but the guards were obdurate.

"The sawdaw wants to see you, novice," said one of them.

Dayong turned back with regrets, with exasperation. He could not force his way through without a scene that would arouse suspicion. He decided immediately to jump the compound wall at the first chance and join the babu outside. He simply could not let this chance be lost! And lost it would be if he did not go along, for Tuan Bruce could do nothing without him but look over his man.

That chance was denied him.

"Come with me—novice who squats!" snarled the bigger of the guards, seizing him firmly by the arm. Dayong had a mad impulse to throw him off and make good his escape, for those last words were ominous. They had been watching him, suspecting him. There is a peculiar but unmistakable posture in the Malay squat, an ease to it, due to long usage.

He was led into the presence of the two venerable sawdaws seated in the glory of their white robes in an inner room. Between them was the hard-faced abbot, master of the monastery, yellow-robed, eyeing him malignantly as the two guards brought Dayong before them. And, salaaming low at one side, was a wretched Hindoo coolie, perhaps one of the sudras who worked around the place.

"It is Dayong Vila who keeps the animal shop in China Street, O Presences," the man declared after one look at Dayong.

"And what of it, O Greater Glory?" asked Dayong unabashed, though his heart was pounding inwardly. "May not a poor shopman become a novice in the Way of Life?"

"True," quavered the venerable one. "No one is denied knowledge of the Way."

"Well, then?" said Dayong brazenly.

"Only this," broke in the abbot.

In his lap was a package of *swaraj* tracts printed on vile Lucknow block type that Dayong recognized as belonging to Bugwan Dass. On the packet lay a small leatherbound notebook, dirty and greasy from the babu's thumbs. The abbot was tapping it with a scrawny finger, his eyes bent menacingly on Dayong.

"In this book the learned babu has lists of all sahibs in the Kumpanie (British Government). And the third name on one of those lists is Dayong Vila. Thou art in the secret pay of the British Raj, novice!" he accused.

Dayong's face set stonily. He was neatly caught! He cursed all his Malay gods, from Iskhander back to the Twin Rulers of the Universe, that he had not denied the coolie stoutly. It was too late now! The three shaven polls were looking at him fixedly, and fear was growing in the slit eyes of both the old sawdaws as the full meaning of the abbot's accusation came to them. They were all deeply implicated, as deeply as the Rao Bugwan Dass himself, and this Secret Service man knew all!

Dayong could see that, before this fear all the humane tenets of their religion would be as wax. Here was something real, personal; their necks already felt uncomfortable with premonitions of the hangman's noose! He was not surprised

when the abbot eyed him malevolently.

"He must never leave this kyaung alive, Venerable Ones!" came the sentence.

"Aye," muttered the younger of the sawdaws," but we cannot kill. The Lord Buddha forbade the taking of life."

"In truth, and *we* kill not, O Greater Glory. But the Rao; those in India are—ahem—not so strict."

Dayong felt, as he would have put it," belly b'long him walk about a bit inside." He could expect nothing but swift death once the babu learned who his private secretary really was!

The two old sawdaws rocked with agitation as they meditated on this crafty suggestion of their abbot's. On their words now hung Dayong's fate. Both of them were trembling with fear. It was their first contact in many years with the realities of the outside world.

"Can we permit a man to be slain? Before all the pongyis and the novices? A pollution in the house of the Lord Buddha that would let in all the evil *nats* in the world!" quavered the younger sawdaw, his mind torn between fear of this novice who knew too much and the fears of appalling consequences in the spirit world. It might keep him out of Nirvana, this thing, his conscience was telling him! It was hard, after so many holy lives leading to the sawdawship and its chance for the Buddhist heaven!

"He could die secretly. Or accidentally; leave that to the Rao," countered the abbot.

"Yet on all of us is his blood," wept the younger sawdaw disconsolately.

A profound silence reigned after that. Dayong saw that it was going to be hard for this monastery of devout Buddhists to bring themselves to putting him to death, or even consenting to let the babu do it. He took heart. An imprisonment, probably; and, as they had no dungeon, it would be some clumsy thing of chains which he could easily manage. Tuan Bruce would rescue him, once he knew of his predicament.

Then the elder sawdaw spoke. He was even more frightened than the younger, for heavy would be the hand of the British Raj upon him, as head of this monastery, for harboring and abetting a dangerous Hindoo agitator.

"There *is* a way," he said, and everyone breathed his relief and the abbot was all attention. "In the old days of the kings it was done. I was but a young pongyi then. At the consecration of the Sule Pagoda it was. In those days we sacrificed a malefactor to appease the evil *nats*. The Lord Buddha approved, doubtless, for did not the man end his evil days and begin on earth again as a flea, mayhap? Look you, my children," he went on more strongly," the Rao is presenting to Shwe Dagôn a new image of the Enlightened One. The niche for it is ready. It arrives in state today. And then comes the moon and our ritual of consecration. During which the Rao——"

He ceased and waved a lean brown hand in the direction of Dayong.

The abbot immediately took charge of the situation. "Take him out, you two!" he directed the novices guarding Dayong. "See that he is securely chained. And out in the compound, that he pollute our kyaung no longer! It is a condemned malefactor, that false novice!"

He waved Dayong away with disgust.

THE novices hustled him out. They called more to help, for something in the very feel of Dayong's rippling muscles under their hands warned them that the Malay would be more than a match for them both if he got the least chance! Heavily guarded he was led out to a tree in the compound. Chains appeared, were hammered solidly to his ankles, his wrists. They encircled the tree, so there was little hope of any escape by himself. Then they left him, for most of the novices were due for the parade and did not want to miss the glories of it.

Dayong squatted on his hams, in comfort at last, and considered, with the slow patience of the East. He needed Tuan Bruce now. And when? Certainly not while these chains were on him and around the tree. Somewhere between here and the platform of Shwe Dagôn, then? The east steps to it led directly out of the kyaung. It was all sacred ground, forbidden by the British Raj itself to all white men. Still there, if anywhere, Bruce Tuan could station himself and some Sikhs for a rescue.

Dayong decided to give him the bare facts of his execution and trust in his chief to plan the rescue. He got the babu's pronunciamento out of his girdle, broke off a blank end of a strip, and wrote his "honorable assistance" message on it with a pin out of his girdle. He dug up a pebble with his toes to give the thing weight, watched

his chance, and threw it over the compound wall.

The sounds of the procession band had reached his ears before Dayong thought of that pronunciamento. The babu would come hurrying out for it as soon as he got back, for by this time the abbot would have told him the news and what was going to be done about it. The pronunciamento would be priceless evidence if everything came out all right after all, Dayong reasoned, thinking as S.1046 of the Secret Service.

He had slipped up on his plan to nab the babu at the zoo; to be able to produce the pronunciamento at the right time would retrieve his blunder! He drew out the packet again and buried it near by.

And none too soon, for the parade of the bronze Buddha was entering the monastery gate, and no sooner had it disbanded than Bugwan Dass came running out, his face dark and threatening.

"So!" he piped in his high falsetto voice, speaking babu-English in his passion. "I knock off your eyeballs and breaking your tooth-jaws, *budmash!*" he squeaked, and did so, brutally, forthwith.

He was only stopped by a novice sent out with a remonstrance from the sawdaw. Dayong gathered what was left of himself on his hams and waited impassively.

"And where is my pronunciamento to the kyaungs, spy?" the babu hissed. "I look in all writings and not finding—dung of a toad!"

"It went by the pongyi, Mawng Thit, to Pegu this morning, Master," lied Dayong injuredly. "Why give thy servant so much-much beatings?"

The babu was taken aback at that; for a pongyi of the Pegu kyaung *had* left that morning, and he had directed Dayong to give him the document himself. Nor could he prove otherwise. However, he searched the Malay thoroughly and gave a *"Ha!"* of discovery as his hand encountered a leather charm bag hanging about Dayong's neck by a thong.

It contained a charm very potent in love affairs, nothing less than the pelt of an unborn tiger cub and six bristles from the mother's chops. Bugwan Dass threw the treasures on the ground and spat upon them, while Dayong glowered. But the babu had not found his pronunciamento. Presently he gave up and called Dayong a pig, a mountain of cowdung, the son of a noseless mother, and the father of a thousand unclean worms.

"May Allah cut out your heart and poison a million snakes with it!" muttered Dayong in retort as the babu left him.

He gathered up his charms again and put them back into the leather locket. With them went the pronunciamento, tightly folded.

The hot Burma afternoon wore on. Evening lauds, like a strong Gregorian chant, in many male voices, sounded from the monastery. It grew dark and the big stars spangled overhead a velvet black sky. Later came lanterns, novices with hammers and chisels. The chains were cut where they encircled Dayong's tree. Dayong heard the silent struggle and heavy breathing of coolies carrying the bronze Buddha on its dais out of the monastery gate. Up under the black roof of the stairway it would go, to be lodged, in the pitchy darkness, in a niche up under the base of Shwe Dagôn. And then the moon would rise—and his time would come!

SOON after Dayong was led to the gate, surrounded by eager and excited novices all trying to grip him fast. Ahead in the darkness the long procession of pongyis had already formed. The novices filed out after them, two by two. A dozen followed, with him in their midst, two of the biggest holding him, the rest in lines on each side and behind. But they were amateur jailers at best, thought Dayong with a subtle Malay smile, as he slowly gathered chain links up into his fists with his fingers. They should not have left those chains on him! As it was, they made fine striking weapons. A sudden wrench, both arms lashing out with those chains flailing—he was tensed and ready for it as soon as the first sign of Tuan Bruce and his Sikhs appeared!

But they passed up the steps without the least hint of any rescue party. Dayong kept peering right and left into the darkness. Surely Bruce Tuan and the Sihks would be hidden in the bushes on either side of the low brick walls that guarded this staircase! But the procession continued up and up.

"Baik!" (Very well, then!) thought Dayong. "Letter, 'im 'e no find. Can do, alone. Must be."

He decided to use those chains the moment Bugwan Dass attempted to lay hands on him. A sudden leap, striking right and left with them, then a dash for escape. There were three other staircases leading

down from Shwe Dagôn, and only one pongyi guarded each at night.

The moon was a slender sickle in the east when the procession came out on the platform of Shwe Dagôn. Dayong looked around curiously. It was empty and deserted of human beings now, a vast space of flat paving faced by the four archways of the stairs. It was planted thick with tall poles of silver and gold with glittering jewels hanging from the *tis* at their tops. They were votive offerings from wealthy Buddhists all over the East, but Dayong regarded them as so much wondrous loot and ruminated on how it would be to turn dacoit and grow rich.

They passed shrine after shrine around the base of the Great Golden Pagoda, in each a Buddha-image of marble, alabaster, silver, gold, malachite, all life size and worth millions of rupees. Up above in the night towered the gleaming gold shaft, rising in huge rounded swelling curves to the *ti* high in the sky nearly four hundred feet above. A continuous tinkle of silver bells came floating down from the *ti;* with it the dusky flash of jewels sparkled down from even the faint light of the moon. Dayong merely noted that it was after midnight, for the electrics that outlined Shwe Dagôn had been turned off.

They reached the shrine of the bronze Buddha. Calm, cross-legged, it sat in the depths of the niche, eyes closed. the enigmatical smile of Asia playing on the thin lips, the right hand holding a carved lotus flower of white moonstone. A single huge ruby smouldered at the peak of the crown of green bronze naga scales that covered the head of the image.

As one man the whole procession went flat on their faces before it. The venerable sawdaw droned a chant; there were responses at intervals from all the kneeling lines of yellow robes. The moon rose slowly higher as the ritual of installation went on and on.

"Om—mani—padne—hum! Om—mani—padne—hum!" the old sawdaw concluded the ceremony with the measured accents of an ancient Sanscrit rune.

A stern command barked out from the abbot. All the worshippers sat up cross-legged. Novices around Dayong tore off his yellow robe and stripped it to shreds, thus making him a nothing, a less than an animal. Dayong squatted back, only in his loin-cloth now—but ready with a fistful of chain in either hand. All this adoration before the image of a mere man who had claimed to have discovered the only way of Life was to him but the foolishness of infidels.

"For Allah, he is God, and there is none like unto Him!" That verse of the Koran kept ringing in his ears. Dayong was not impressed. Rather, scornful; as only a Malay well fortified in the precepts of the Faith can be.

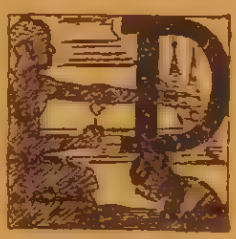
"Proceed, Rao!" ordered the abbott.

Dayong eyed the babu disdainfully. Bugwan Dass was now on his feet, his hand on the hilt of a small dagger at his belt.

"May maggots consume your liver!" muttered Dayong.

The Hindoo approached, step by step. An invocation propitiary to the evil *nats* was being raised by the abbot's voice. Dayong gathered that he was now going to be sacrificed by this babu, and was only curious as to just how he proposed to do it with that dagger. His muscles tensed like steel under the grip of the two novices who held him. The babu had got behind him. Dayong listened with junglewise ears. At the last and nearest footfall, he was going to——

And then there was a general gasp, for the Buddha had suddenly come to life!



DAYONG saw that its eyes were now open and looking upon them all sternly from the depths of its niche. He heard low cries of awe, of fear, of sheer terror arise from all the pongyis and novices, heard the babu behind him gibbering like a scared ape, and felt the novices that gripped him loosen their holds. Slowly as the timeless movement of an automaton the Buddha swung out its left arm. Ghastly green in the moonlight it was, its index finger pointing directly at Bugwan Dass. The whole monastery went flat on their foreheads before it, this miracle, this incarnation of the Lord Buddha in one of his own statues.

They had convincing precedent for it—that Buddha in Amarapura who shed tears, prophesying calamities; the one in the Seyin temple who spake oracles hollowly. Every one of them devoutly believed that this one was miraculous and went prostrate in frightened prayer before it. The babu's teeth were chattering before that accusing arm, his knees knocking. The veneer of his Western education had left him like a rent veil and his Hindoo elder gods took possession of him. Like the others, he went to his knees.

Instantly the Buddha's placid face wrinkled to a stern frown of command, his eyes now on Dayong, his lips parted in a silent word, grim lines graven from nose to mouth. Dayong recognized *that* face instantly—Bruce Romney's—and smote heavily upon the babu's bowed head with a welt of his chain. Obeying further signs from the Buddha he picked up the unconscious babu and carried him behind the prostrate lines of pongyis to join his chief, who had now leaped noiselessly down from the niche. Together they hurried around the base of Shwe Dagôn, where Bruce swiftly picked up a bundle, slipped on the yellow pongyi robe that made it, and ripped off his green crown, crushing the paper scales of it into a wad and thrusting it within the robe.

He now made a very reverend pongyi indeed, and Dayong grinned at the stiff bootbrush of black hair that crowned his chief's dark face and was bursting with delight over the cleverness of his rescue. Without doubt it was a feather in the cap of the Secret Service!

Bruce laid finger on lips.

"We've not got much time," he whispered, "for those beggars will come out of their prayers *ek dum* to have another look. Come!"

They went on around into the deep shadows of the western side of Shwe Dagôn. The four coolies were there, standing beside the litter on which sat the bronze Buddha.

"Ye have my leave to go," said Bruce, walking up to them authoritatively. "Hasten now, to the shrine, Outcast Ones, for the whole monastery waits! Should the abbot demand why ye were late, answer him only this: 'The Lord Buddha did not approve.'"

"That ought to hold 'em!" said Bruce to Dayong as the coolies salaamed and struggled off around the vast curve of Shwe Dagôn's base with their burden. "Come along with the babu. Out we go!"

Down the dark flight of the west staircase they hurried, Bruce in the lead, Dayong following half buried under the insensible babu.

"Lo, a Hindoo sneak-thief that was caught hiding among the sacred relics, brother," said Bruce to the pongyi on guard at the foot of the stairs and indicating the babu with a jerk of his thumb over shoulder, "Call me a gharry and two Sikh policemen."

The pongyi nodded and blew on his whistle. He had evidently met this pongyi with the black hair and the livid face before and was entirely obliging. Once driving off in the gharry, with the Sikhs seated opposite and their unconscious prisoner between them, Bruce let out a sigh of relaxation.

"Went off rather well, didn't it, what?" he said cheerily to Dayong. "Couldn't leave Shwe Dagon with the Sikhs, y'see; so I thought of impersonating that bronze Buddha, which, by the way, was stolen from the Jaipur temple by *swaraj* agents to stir up trouble, I learn from Calcutta.

"To be Buddha wasn't difficult at all—tube of green stage paint and a paper crown. A chap once came to a gymkhana ball as Apollo, y' know. To get in I just put in the pongyi robe and got past that blighter at the west stairs. Went up and waited around a bit. Met the coolies coming up with the real Buddha and told them to take it around to the west side and wait until I came for them. Then disrobed, put on the crown, and got in the niche myself. Pretty good for a lone raid, eh, what, Dayong?" Bruce laughed merrily. "And you were right keen with your end of it—when we left 'em all praying away like good'uns! By the way, how did you come to get mislaid, as it were, this morning, Dayong?"

The Malay grinned maliciously.

"Wait, Tuan!" he said; then kicked the babu viciously in the shins.

The babu groaned and came shuddering out of his stupor. His eyes opened and he looked, just once, at the turbaned Sikhs on either side and the handcuffs on his wrists; then began to blubber.

Dayong kicked him once more.

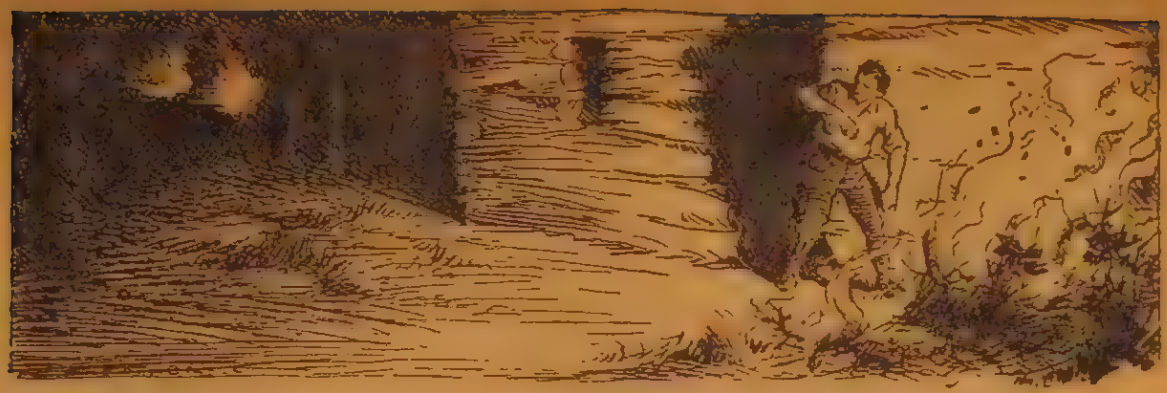
"You babu-feller, you still t'ink litty hippo him shed'm skull?" he asked coyly.

Bruce, comprehending at once, exploded with laughter.

"So that was it, eh? Oh, priceless, Dayong! And you had evidence, I suppose, but got held up yourself?" he asked. "We have nothing against him yet, y' know, but assault with intent to kill, and will have difficulty in proving that satisfactorily."

"Sure!" grinned Dayong. Out of the leather wallet on his neck he produced one dried tiger-cub pelt that was a potent charm against fear, six bristles from the mother's chops that were useful in love affairs, and the pronunciamento of one Bugwan Dass—and with that last the case against the babu stood complete.

"Good work, S.1046!" said Bruce fervidly and gripped the Malay's hand.



LONG-LEAF LANDS

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "The Master Squatter," "Oklahoma '89," etc.

Into the rich long-leaf pine lands of East Texas came Sam Smedley, scornful of the "squirrel-hunter" natives and ruthlessly intent on snatching a fortune in timber. Surely his plans moved forward—until they snapped on the honesty of a Texas timber-cruiser.

"WHERE'S Tom Stone?"

"Out in the bunk-shack, sir."

"Tell him to come here!"

After giving the order, Mr. Sam Smedley eased himself into a strong chair, took off his hat, and mopped his brow. It was only the first of May, but it was hot in East Texas. Mr. Smedley was a heavy man, with hanging jowls and a good-natured face. It was spoiled, however, by two dark pools of greed and avarice that lay far back in his eyes.

Originally, the Smedley Lumber Company were hardwood people, operating in Southeast Missouri and in Northeast Arkansas. When their holdings had been worked out, they drifted into the piney woods of Texas. With the coming of a railroad into the great pine forests, mills had sprung up and prospered while working timber that was close to the line. As good saw-timber became scarce, a small mill-owner by the name of Frank Thompson conceived the idea of acquiring cheap land at a distance of ten miles from the main line of the railroad and hauling the timber. Thompson was a visionary and failed because of the condition of the terrain over which he must route his teams. Scouting for a new field, Sam Smedley's sharp nose for business smelled out the mortgages on the silent Thompson mill, and almost before Thompson knew it he was ousted and the Smedley Lumber Company was in possession.

It was freely predicted that Smedley would fail, but the shrewd lumberman had plenty of money to build a tap line of railway to the main line. This tap would be on his own land half way, and he was secretly acquiring right of way the rest of the ten miles. He knew a private line hadn't the right of eminent domain, and he didn't purpose being held up by some greedy land-owner.

Tom Stone, whom the lumberman had ordered to his presence, was a timber-cruiser. He had been three years with Smedley and was a valuable man. Smedley had bought the stumpage on many a tract merely on Stone's estimate, and never once had the young man been at fault.

A tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, collar open and neck rising from his massive body like a young pine tree, strode into the office, his laced boots thumping on the floor. There was a questioning look in his calm, gray eyes, as he ran his fingers through his crinkly brown hair.

"Send for me, Mr. Smedley?" he asked.

"Yes. Sit down. You cruised that three sections of Holderness land that lies just below us on the east side of the Neches?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sure yo' figgers are right, specially on the long-leaf stuff and the cypress?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, there's a hitch in the trade for it. We can't buy the land outright, as we have from the rest of these poor squirrel-hunters in here. It belongs to a non-resident, and there's minor heirs or something."

"Yes, sir."

"It's good timber and I want it, but——"

"Yes, sir."

"Shut up! Don't stand there and say 'yes, sir' to me, like a damned parrot. I'm trying to tell you something, and I want you to pay particular attention. I found a way to get the stumpage, and that's all I want. The land won't be worth a damn, except to pay taxes on, for two hundred years after the saw-stock is off'n it.

"There's a lawyer, Joe Nelms, at the county seat. He's agent for the rental of the little farm that's on the tract. Nelms says that if I can get an affidavit of an expert as to the timber on the land he's sure he can get an order to sell it to me at current prices, with a good discount for cash."

"That would be a fair way to handle it, sir," said Stone.

"Yes," snarled Smedley, "fair enough, but it ain't handled yet. I got yo' figures on that tract, right here in my desk. Now, here's what I want you to do. Go into town, get Nelms to write the affidavit like he wants it. You give him the figgers—split exactly in the middle—and when it's ready you go before the county clerk, sign the affidavit and swear to it."

"Why—why, Mr. Smedley, you never asked me to do a thing like that before!"

"No!" snapped Smedley. "Because I never wanted you to before. I'm not asking you now! I'm telling you. Maybe you understand that."

An odd look came into Tom Stone's narrowed and unblinking eyes.

"Mr. Smedley, you've been pretty white to me the last three years," he said quietly. "For that reason alone, you're the only man on earth that could make that proposition to me and not get knocked kicking for his trouble."

"Mean you don't want to do it?"

"I mean a little more than that. I mean I'd see you, or any other man, in hell farther than a jaybird can fly by Christmas, before I'd do it."

"All right!" snapped Smedley. "You're fired."

"You can't fire me. I quit the instant you insulted me with your dirty proposal."

"Get to hell out of my mill-yard!" stormed Smedley. "I don't want a man like you talking to my men!"

"I won't talk to them. I don't do business that way," and turning on his heel, Tom Stone went to the boarding shack.

He packed his scant belongings in a gunny-bag, threw it over his shoulder, and trudged away toward the railroad, over foot-logs where moccasins slid into slimy waters and alligators blinked in the sunshine on the edge of the swamps.

Tom had tramped five miles, and was clear of Smedley's land, before he consented to stop and rest. He was now on cut-over land, within five miles of town, which was due north of where the Smedley mill was located.

Stone took a blue-print map from his pocket and began studying it. The tract of land that he was sitting on at that moment, according to the map, was four hundred and eighty varas—about a quarter of a mile—wide, and about two miles long. It lay across the Neches River and extended out a mile from the stream on each side. Obviously, it was a strip that had lain between two old Spanish grants. That intrigued Mr. Stone, as did also two leagues of land that lay on the west side of the river, directly opposite Smedley's mill.

Tom Stone shouldered his pack and started on toward town. He had gone but a little way when he came to a cabin that stood on a hummock of rising ground in the swamp. Tom walked up to the pole fence around the cabin. A man stood in the door, watching him, as he approached. A rickety wagon with a woebegone team hitched to it stood near. In the wagon were a handful of crude household goods.

"Climb over, stranger!" called the man. "I would ast you to come in, but I'm comin' out."

"How's that?"

"'Bandonin' this old cabin and God forsaken slice of land."

"Do you own the land?"

"Yep."

"What did you pay for it?"

"Nothin'! It was wished on me. I heired it from pap. Bawn in this here cabin, Mister. Laish Taylor's my name."

"Stone's mine. Why don't you sell the land?"

"Can't be did, podner. Tried to onload it with the timber, but the mill wouldn't buy nothin' but the stumpage. Goin' to'ds town?"

Tom Stone admitted that he was going toward town, thanked Mr. Taylor for the proffered ride, and they got into the wagon and drove away.

OLD JUDGE BINDLEY was gray and fat and jolly. His eyes twinkled under his bushy gray brows, and he shook like a mountain of jelly when he laughed, which was often. The morning after Tom Stone was discharged from the Smedley Lumber Company, Judge Bindley sat in his dusty office on the courthouse square, fairly trembling with suppressed laughter. He controled himself for the time, but a few minutes later, when he saw a young fellow in laced boots ride out of town on a hog-backed plug, he fairly roared with laughter. The young man was Tom Stone. Mr. Stone didn't know Judge Bindley was laughing at him, if indeed so much man, on so little horse, was the cause of the jurist's merriment. Tom, at least, was in no laughing humor.

"Tom Stone don't git mad but once a year, but when he do git mad, hell shore pops!" an old timber foreman had once said. There was nothing popping, audibly, as Tom rode his grotesque mount out of town, but he was seething with anger on the inside. He was telling himself that he owed Sam Smedley a debt and had the rest of his life in which to pay it—and he was good pay! He seemed now to be heading for the Smedley Mills, where he was known to have been working. A mile below town he crossed to the west side of the Neches River and took his way through the swamps and fallen timber of the cut-over land. At last he reached virgin pine forest, untouched by the hand of man. With the trained eye of an expert cruiser, he viewed the giant pine and cypress trees as he picked his way through the dense bottom.

IT WAS almost noon. Old Dad Bynum was sitting on the gallery of his pine-log cabin, waiting for his dinner and playing with the long ears of his favorite hound while he sucked at a corn-cob pipe. Dad was a typical squirrel-hunter. His cabin, which fronted east, toward the river, stood on the point of a little spit of the sandy uplands that ran out into the swamps and marshes of the river bottom.

"Light, stranger, and come in!" called Bynum, as a man stopped at the fence.

"Stone's my name, Tom Stone," said the visitor, extending a hand as he stepped up on the gallery.

"Bynum's mine, Tobe Bynum, mostly called Dad Bynum. Best rifleshot, fox-hunter and fisherman in the Neches Bottoms. Take a chair!"

"Fine timber here, Mr. Bynum," commented Tom.

"Yup. Fine as they air in Neches Bottoms. I split ten thousand two-foot boards out'n one tree in them bottoms about twenty year ago. Just twenty year ago, I reck'n it were. Viney was a baby then."

"Seems that such timber should be valuable."

"Hit do look like it, Mr. Stone, but it won't bring nothin'. I been dickerin' some with a sharp-nosed, web-footed timber lawyer, named Nelms. He offers two dollars an acre, but he only wants to take the land where the timber is. That would cut me plumb off from fishin' and huntin' grounds. Nothin' won't stay on cut-over lands. Hit's the Godfersakenest place in the whole world. 'Sides that, hit would leave me with a lot of sand ridges that ain't no 'count, less'n a feller could live on chinkapins and sand burrs. Pretty rough grub for anything 'cept a hawg or something."

"Yes, I should thing it would be," smiled Tom. "You didn't sell, I suppose."

"No sirree! Take all or none, I says. I druther let it all go at a dollar an acre than to sell the bottoms at two dollars and have to keep the rest and pay tax on it."

"How much is there in the tract?"

"Why, hit's two leagues. I heired it from pap, and he got it in a trade away back yonder. Pap used to say to me, 'Tobe,' he says, 'them virtuous pine timber will be worth a pile of money one of these days.' He, he, he! Ef he'd left me two leagues of them black prairies, out a ways, I'd dang nigh be a millionaire by this time. But they thought the prairies was no 'count in them times. Yes, they's two leagues—'bout nine thousand acres. Fronts six mile on the river, and runs three mile out into the ridges. Never been surveyed, fur as I——"

"Pap, dinner's ready."

The voice tinkled like a silver bell, in spite of the piney woods drawl. Tom Stone whose back was to the cabin door, sprang to his feet and turned facing a young girl. Her hair, which was the tawny color of ripe corn, hung in a thick plait down her back, her eyes were as blue as the sea, while her dress was of faded calico, but

nothing could disguise the fact that she was pretty.

"My darter, Viney, Mr. Stone," introduced Bynum.

Recovered from his surprise, Tom Stone acknowledged the introduction gallantly.

"Walk in and sit, Mr. Stone," invited Viney.

"Why, I—I don't wish to impose—" stammered Tom.

"Ain't imposin' none, if you can put up with the fare," interrupted Dad Bynum. "Pore folks has pore ways, but you're welcome to sech as it is."

They went in and sat down to corn pone, bacon, sour-dock greens, young onions, and clear, amber coffee. Tom was an outdoor man, and grub that would stick to the ribs met his hearty approval.

Back on the gallery, their pipes going, Tom Stone's mind turned to that "virtuous" pine timber. Dad Bynum was long-winded and told things slowly, but Tom wanted to know more.

"And the tract has never been surveyed," he offered, to start the old squirrel-shooter going.

"No, it never has been, and hit won't be if I have to pay fer it. I told Nelms I'd take ten thousand dollars for the whole shebang, or I wouldn't do nothin'."

"He took it, didn't he?"

"Nope. Said he'd have to see his principal. I just told him he could see his principal, and his interest too, for all I keered, but that was what I'd do, and that was all I'd do."

"Did you sign a sale contract?"

"Didn't sign anything and ain't goin' to ontel I get them ten thousand dollars."

"The land is worth more than that, Mr. Bynum."

"Would you be willin' to give more?"

"Yes, I certainly would if I had enough money to buy it."

"And, yes again. If I had that much money, I wouldn't sell it. I'm broke and owin', and I don't like to be that way. A'tter I see Nelms, if he don't take what I offered, you can talk some more. No matter what you offered, now, I'd stick by what I told Nelms."

They smoked out their pipes in silence; after that; then Dad Bynum rose.

"I aim to take a round in the bottoms, for squirrels," he said. "Young ones is just right for stewin' now. Hit's a pretty long way around the head of that arm of the swamp, if you aim to go back to town, but it's the only road, less'n you knowed the bottoms better than what you do."

SMILING at Bynum's adroit but unmistakable dismissal, Tom Stone mounted his old plug and took his way around the head of the swamp, which extended back into the sandy ridge. He had come back into the road opposite the cabin, when Viney stepped out and raised her hand as a signal for him to stop.

"Mr. Stone, I—I want to have speech with you," she said, hesitantly.

"Why, certainly, Miss Bynum," and Tom dismounted, wondering what was to come.

"I heared you and pap talking about the timber land," said Viney, coming to the business in hand at once. "You're a timber man, ain't you?"

"Yes'm."

"Well, I know you ain't scoutin' for that sharp-nosed Nelms feller, 'cause I heared you say the land was worth more than what he offered. 'Sides that, you look square and honest."

"Thank you," said Tom, simply, and waited for her to go on.

"Now me, I ain't had no schoolin', ner no chance, but I know how big a acre of ground is. I stepped off a acre in them bottoms, and then I counted the trees on it—just the big ones. If one of them trees is worth a dollar, and it shorely ought to be, that acre is worth a hundred and fifty dollars. Hit weren't the thickest acre I could find, either, but just middlin' thick. I can't figger much, but I got wild-hawg sense enough to know that them bottoms is worth a heap more than what pap has agreed to take for 'em."

"Yes, that's true," replied Tom, "but the point is that Mr. Bynum has agreed on the price, and he won't break his word."

"I know. Pap is that way. He's a good hunter and fisher and a powerful good man. He thinks a man can't go to heaven onless he keeps his word, and maybe he can't. He ain't had no more schoolin' than I had, and he ain't got much more sense than me. Keepin' yo' word is right—if'n you got sense enough to know what you're doin' when you give it, but——"

Viney stopped and sat down on a fallen tree by the roadside, elbows on knees and chin in hands. There was a far away, troubled look in her blue eyes. Stone said nothing, because he didn't know anything to say. After a long minute Viney sighed.

"Mr. Stone, I been plumb desprit, ever

since pap told me what he 'greed to take for the land," she went on. "Some men could do a lot with ten thousand dollars. Pap couldn't do nothin' but spend it—or let somebody take it away from him. It's bad enough to live here in this bottom, with nothin' but the cabin, a little garden, and a few razor-back hawgs, but we have got that and a place for pap to hunt and fish. If he sells, it won't be no time ontel we won't have even that much. When I heared you talk you sounded like you had timber sense and like you might be sorter honest. So, when you and pap was gone, I just taken out acrost the swamp to ast you if you couldn't help me some way."

"I don't see any way I can help," Tom admitted reluctantly. "As I told your father, I'd give a good deal more for the land, if I had the money, but I haven't it —now."

"Mebbe that big Smedley mill, acrost the river, would give more."

"No. Nelms is their agent. I cruised every acre of your father's good timber land for Smedley. That's why I know it is worth more than Nelms offered for it."

Viney's blue eyes went dark, and she half rose from the log, on which Tom Stone had also seated himself.

"Then I kinder come to a goat's house for wool," she said sharply. "You belong to the same gang. Looks funny you'd be knockin' Nellums' deal. Don't think much of keepin' yo' word and playin' square, do you," and there was contempt in her tone.

"Just a minute, before you pass judgment, Miss Bynum," Tom interrupted and briefly he told this piney woods girl what had happened at the Smedley mill the day before. He went further and told her how he had fought mosquitoes and taken chances with malaria in summer and had waded snow and slush in winter, for Sam Smedley, only to be insulted with a command to steal at the end of that service.

"I take it all back, Tom," said Viney, frankly. "So, them's the kind of people that pap's so partic'ler to keep his word with. I don't blame you none for wanting to cut that Smedley off from this Bynum Bottom. I wish't I could help you do it, on yo' own account, as well as on mine and pap's account."

"Maybe you can," said Tom, who had been thinking rapidly.

"Who, me?"

"Yes, if you have a good deal of nerve."

"Huh! I had nerve enough to beat a alligator to death with a club, what had hold of our best sow by the hind laig. I sho'ly ought to have enough to chunk that Smedley outfit some, when they got Pap and the Bynum Bottoms by both hind laigs."

Tom smiled at Viney's way of putting the proposition.

"Is your mother living?" he asked.

"No. Died when I was twelve."

"I see. Then your father can't give title to this land unless you join him."

"Meanin'——?"

"Meaning that it was a community estate, and half of it, your mother's half, belongs to you. All you have to do is to refuse to sign the deed. Refuse to sign anything. If they drive you too far, employ a lawyer and sue for a partition of the estate."

"Tom," said Viney, rising, "I don't know exactly what you mean, but you've helped me some. I can understand that I ain't to sign nothin'."

Viney extended her small, brown hand.

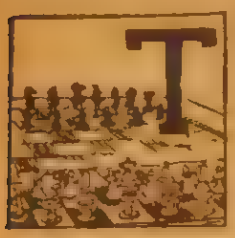
"Thank'ye, Tom, Goodby," and with that she disappeared into the swamp, springing from log to log like some wild thing.

Tom Stone stood watching her until the last flash of her faded calico dress disappeared in the thick bottom; then he mounted his spavined plug and took the road toward town. When he left the Bynum cabin, his hopes lay in ruins about him. This interview with Viney had raised them again. True, their only support was the nerve and staying qualities of a girl, but then—Viney had beaten an alligator to death with a club to protect her own. A broad grin spread over Tom's face as the old plug splashed on through the swamp.

Mentally Tom weighed the situation. Of course Smedley would try to close the deal for Bynum's land. He knew all about the millions of feet of fine pine and cypress timber. He had Tom's figures on it, the same as he had on the Holderness land. He knew Bynum's land was worth at least a hundred times what he had offered for it. He was a shrewd lumberman, and that one deal would make him a fortune. Without the Bynum forest, even if Smedley could steal the Holderness stumpage, with the aid of Nelms, he would have no great field to work.

Tom sighed as he came out into the cut-over lands near town. It looked like a slim chance. Just the will of a slender girl between him and the failure of a great idea. If he had a little money it would be different. When he had paid the livery stable for the use of the old crow-bait that he

had ridden on that wild goose chase, he would have less than five dollars left. Future events were on the knees of the gods, where he must leave them whether he would or not.



TOM STONE had left the Smedley Lumber Company on a Monday afternoon. On Tuesday, he had visited Dad Bynum. So rapidly had events transpired that by Wednesday morning Tom had thrown his coat on a pile of slabs, at a little sawmill that was slabbing cross-ties in a belt of hardwood timber a mile north of town. He had a job and was proceeding to earn his keep while the game went on. Old Sam Smedley, president of the Smedley Lumber Company, had been figuring furiously with a stump of pencil since it was light enough to see. Finally, convinced that two and two make four, and also that figures don't lie, he turned to an off-color underling in the office.

"Is Bill Boston here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. He's out in the saw-yard."

"Tell him to come here."

A few minutes later a two-fisted giant of a man, with the eyes of a pig and the neck of a bull, entered the office.

"Sit down, Bill," commanded Smedley. "Reck'n you'd as soon go to town with me today as to go with yo' gang to the bottoms."

"Reck'n I would," grinned Boston.

"Guess you heard that I fired Tom Stone. He's been getting a hundred and fifty, and you've been getting a hundred and twenty-five. Do you want his job, as timber-cruiser, at a hundred and seventy-five a month?"

"Shore I want it."

"All right, you get it. Just take up where Tom left off. Here's his figgers on that Holderness tract. You and me'll go to town today. I want you to make affidavit to these figgers, just like they was yo' own. They'd be just the same if you made 'em."

"All right, sir, said Bill. He knew he didn't have the ability to take Tom Stone's place, but it didn't worry him.

Before starting to town, Smedley and his new cruiser took a turn through the big yards. Saws were whining and sawdust flying everywhere. There were cribs and racks of lumber in every direction, and the stock was growing every day.

"Ef you don't move some of this lumber pretty soon," grinned Bill Boston, "hit'll be like Carter's oats—you'll have to rent ground to stack it on."

"I'll move it when the time comes. Let's go," snapped Smedley.

Another man had been appointed foreman of logging gang No. 1, in Bill Boston's place. As he and Smedley walked away toward the buckboard that was to take them to town there was a look of joy in the eyes of the gang, for Bill Boston had a heavy hand. Everybody recognized him as the best man in point of physical strength and fighting courage in the logging outfit—or anywhere else about the Smedley mills, for that matter.

That same afternoon Sam Smedley sat in Joe Nelms' office, while Bill Boston was taking aboard a few drinks after making the false affidavit as directed.

"Everything's ready, then?" Smedley summed up. "You got the right of way across the cut-over land all tied up?"

"Y-e-s," drawled Nelms.

"Got that clause in all the contracts, where they agree not to give or sell a right-of-way to any other road? Got the land tied up for a yard at this end of the track?"

"Yes."

"Fine! That puts the Bynum timber in a pocket, where it'll stay for a thousand years if he don't trade with me." Smedley's eyes fairly glittered with greed, as he went on: "I'll teach these squirrel-shooters something about business methods. I'll start at once. Got to build sheds here and put in a planing mill. Everything's ready, machinery all ordered. I'll put a big gang at work at each end. One working out from here so's the rails can be laid as they go, and another one driving piling and coming this way from the mill. Then I'll post a little prize for the gang that get's to the half-way point first, and they'll work their heads off."

Nelms grinned at the lumberman's shrewdness.

"There's just one little chance for a hitch, and that's the Bynum land," continued Smedley. "With that cinched, I'm settin' jake. You say you got it cinched. How?"

"Why, Bynum won't sell half of it, and he won't sell it anyway except for cash. He offers to take ten thousand, spot cash, for the whole tract. Said he'd be here Saturday to see what we want to do about it, and he'd die before he'd break his word."

"But I don't want to buy it, right now."

"Why?"

"Well," muttered Smedley, "I reck'n a man's lawyer has got to know a right smart about his business. The situation is like this. When me and my brothers broke up, in the hardwood country, I had just a hundred and fifty thousand to my share, and part of that was in land. I've sunk a lot of money here, and this narrow-gage railroad through the swamp will cost a lot more. I got enough lumber already cut to pay for it, if it was on the market, but it ain't on the market and won't be until the road's finished. I got to take care of my payroll, and it's heavy. Just now, everything's goin' out and nothin' comin' in, as the feller said when the bottom bust out of his barrel."

"I see, I see."

"'Course you do. Now, I'll write you a check for a thousand dollars. You use that to tie up Bynum's land until the first of October. By that time I'll have lumber on the market and be in the clear. The banks here might be willin' to back me, but I don't ask favors, and then I don't have to grant 'em. You ought to be able to stall that trade along five months."

"All right," drawled Nelms, with his eyes half closed. "Gimme the check, and I'll see what I can do."

Smedley wrote the check and started for the door.

"This timber cruiser you got is a new man, ain't he?" Nelms ventured.

"No. Been with me two-three year."

"I thought your cruiser's name was Stone."

"Was, but I fired him."

"Can you depend on this fellow Boston?"

"He'll do anything I tell him to do."

"Fine. I thought Stone knew a little too much to make a real good cruiser."

A glance shot between the two men, and Sam Smedley went on about his business well pleased with the situation.

THE next move in the game was when Dad Bynum clumped into Joe Nelms' office on Saturday, pulling at his old cob pipe.

"Well—seen yo'—principal—an' interest—an' things?" he asked, between puffs.

"Yes," replied Nelms. "We'll take the land at your offer, but——"

"All right. Make out the papers an' give me the ten thousand dollars, and I'll sign 'em."

"But, Mr. Bynum, as big a deal as that can't be handled that way. In the first place, we'll have to have an abstract."

"What for? I heired that land from pap. Pap bought it from the 'riginal grantee that got it from the Mexican gov'ment. It ain't passed through no more hands, and hit's been in our family more'n fifty year."

"That may all be true, but we must have a record of it."

"Find a record at the co't-house, I reck'n."

"Perhaps so, but you don't understand these things, Mr. Bynum. Now——"

"I understand this much. I'm broke and owin', and I don't like to be that way. Only for that, I wouldn't sell for no price."

"Well, now listen to me, Mr. Bynum. I think I can relieve your situation this way: you make a sale contract with us, agreeing to take ten thousand for the land and give possession the fifteenth day of October. By that time we can have the abstract made, the title proved up, and everything in good shape, and——"

"Yes, an' before that time I'd be sued and in court, where I ain't never been and don't want to be. I got to have——"

"How much do you owe?"

"Dang night four hundred dollars, intrust and all."

"All right. We can take care of that. You sign a sale contract, and I'll pay a housand down. That will put you in the clear and leave you six hundred. Then, on the fifteenth of October, you'll get the other nine thousand, if there's no flaw in the title, and I'm sure there won't be."

With a thousand dollars and freedom from "owin'" in sight, Dad Bynum's purpose to sign nothing until he got the ten thousand dollars weakened.

"All right. Draw up yo' paper and let's look at it."

The lawyer's long fingers swept over the keys of his typewriter. Presently he drew two copies of the contract out of the machine and handed one to Dad Bynum.

"You're representing Sam Smedley in this deal, ain't you?" Bynum asked.

"Yes," replied Nelms.

"All right. I reck'n somebody ought to represent me. We'll take this down to old Judge Bindley. If he says it's all right, you pay me the thousand and I'll sign it."

Together they went to Bindley's office.

"Judge, I got a job for you, Bynum greeted the fat lawyer. "Look at this paper, and tell me if it's all right."

Judge Bindley adjusted his glasses and

read the contract with half closed eyes.

"Sellin' that land pretty low, ain't you, Bynum?" he growled.

"Mr. Bynum only asked you for advice as to the validity of this contract," snarled Nelms.

"Yes, that's all I asked for," interposed Dad Bynum. "Fact is, it ain't enough, Judge, but when you town fellers voted them cou't-house an' jail bonds onto us pore land-owners you riz taxes ontel it ruint us. I got behind, and I'm broke and owin', and——"

"I'm in a hurry," fidgeted Nelms. "The point is, do you consider the contract valid, Judge Bindley?"

"Are you satisfied with it?" asked the old judge, slowly veiling his thoughtful eyes with heavy lids.

"I will be when Mr. Bynum affixes his signature."

"All right. He ought to be satisfied. I'll pass it."

"Good! Just sign here, Mr. Bynum, and I'll sign for the lumber company."

"Wait a minute," whined dad. "Where's the money?"

"Here's Mr. Smedley's check. I'll endorse it to you."

"Never min'. Just bring the check and the contract over to the bank. Gimme the money, and I'll sign. I can count money right peart, but I never could do much countin' checks. I'll come back and pay you when I get the money, Judge."

"That's all right, Tobe. Just bring me a mess of young squirrels the next time you come to town," chuckled the judge.

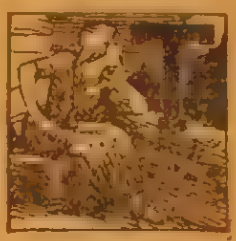
"I'll shore do that. Had a mess stewed the other day. They're just prime."

When Bynum and Nelms were gone, Judge Bindley leaned back in his chair.

"If Tobe Bynum had twice as much sense as he's got, he'd be almost as smart as a woodchuck," he muttered to himself. "If Joe Nelms had half as much sense as he thinks he's got, he'd be the smartest lawyer that ever was in Texas."

Then he took his pipe out of his mouth and chuckled for five minutes. After that he took out his handkerchief, wiped away the tears of laughter and, spreading it over his face to keep the flies away, went to sleep. Thus was consummated the sale of the wonderful long-leaf lands of the Bynum Bottoms, where Tom Stone had vainly hoped one day to hear the whine of his own saw.

When Dad Bynum drove out of town that evening he was happy. He wasn't "broke and owin'." In his rattley old wagon there was a keg of syrup, bags of flour, coffee, canned fruits, and a liberal stock of other supplies. Wrapped in an old quilt was a bright, new shotgun, against the coming of ducks in the fall. In a big bundle were nine gaudy calico dress patterns, two pairs of shoes, and other items for Viney. In a round bandbox, beside him on the seat, was a hat trimmed with flaming poppies, a pair of cotton gloves, a feather fan and a silver tucking comb. Trust Dad to remember a good girl like Viney and to see that she got her share of their prosperity.



THAT night, after Viney had put the other things away and had shoved the box of finery under her bed, she went out and sat on the gallery in the moonlight. She had hoped for much from Tom Stone, but he had failed her. He had been mistaken, and pap had sold the land anyway. She wished she could see Tom and talk to him about it all. Anyway, she had kept her promise. She hadn't signed anything. True, she hadn't been asked to sign anything, but she wouldn't have if she had been asked. She'd made a promise to Tom Stone. Far into the night she sat pondering her problem and wondering if she'd ever see Tom again.

The next day being Sunday, Tom felt that since he had a job he could afford to pay a dollar for the old plug and take another ride. There was a strange attraction for him in that "virtuous" pine forest of Dad Bynum's. He wanted to go again and look at it, to hear the wind moan in its branches. He had no idea that it had already been sold.

"Well, Mr. Stone, I told you if Nelms didn't take up my offer I'd dicker with you about the land, and I guess you come for that." Bynum greeted him on the gallery in front of the cabin. "Facts is, Nelms took me up."

There was a look of pained surprise, shot with flashes of anger, on Tom's face that Dad didn't fail to notice.

"That ain't no reason why you and me shouldn't be friendly——"

"Dinner's ready, Pap," a weary voice said, as he was about to go on.

Tom greeted Viney warmly, and they went in to dinner. There was no corn pone and sour-dock today. No such vulgar dishes as that, but food for gods. There were biscuits, light and brown, a

great stack of russet fried chicken, flanked by a bowl of cream gravy. Then there was a generous dewberry pie, while occupying the center of the rickety old table was a blue bowl, filled with canned apricots, not to mention other delicacies.

After doing full justice to the wonderful dinner, Tom and old Dad smoked on the gallery, and Bynum discoursed on fishing tackle while Viney cleared away the dishes. Finally, she came out and sat silently listening to the conversation. At last, Dad rose and refilled his pipe.

"I seen some bees watering in a holler stump, the yuther day," he said. "Think I'll just prowl down the bottom and see kin I locate it again."

With no further word he walked away and left Tom and Viney sitting on the gallery. It was some minutes before the silence between them was broken.

"I reck'n you see Pap's made a raise?" Viney said then in a halting sort of voice.

"Yes, he told me he had sold the land," and there was a tiny note of accusation in Tom's voice.

"I didn't sign nothin', Tom," denied Viney, before she had been accused. "I was plumb broken up when Pap come home last night and told me he had sold. He jes' signed some kind of contract and got a thousand dollars down, the rest to be paid in October when he makes the deeds and gives up the land."

"Oh, is that it?" There was hope in Tom's tone.

"Yes, that's the way it is, Tom, but it won't be no different. Pap'll soon squander it all. Nobody don't understand what it means to me. I've stayed here year after year. I've wore laced shoes that weren't even rights and lefts, when I knowed other women had shoes that buttoned on the side—hopin' that some day a white man would put a mill in the big bottom and pay pap what the trees was worth so's I could have things and mebbe be somebody. B—but—now the land's sold, and—and——"

Viney stopped on a choking note and looked off toward the emerald sea of waving pines. There was such a tightness in Tom's throat when he saw her brush away a tear that it was a minute before he could speak.

"Oh, well, I wouldn't worry, Miss Viney," he comforted her. "You'll get half of the money, and——"

"Don't mind me, Tom. I feel better since I told somebody and cried a little about it. I'm shore glad you come today. I just felt like I couldn't abide it here alone. Come in the house and let me show you what pap brung me from town."

The nine gaudy dress-patterns were laid on the table. Then the gorgeous hat, the gloves, and the feather fan came out of the round box.

"I think it'll look right purty, when I get my hair did up and all," said Viney, her eyes still shining with tears. "Mebbe I could just quile it," and suiting the action to the word she coiled the great plait at the back of her shapely head, fastened it with the silver tucking-comb, and put on the hat.

SUDDENLY the poppies had lost their gaudy tints. There were russet leaves on the hat to match her hair and sprays of tiny forget-me-nots to match her eyes. Then she caught a look on Tom Stone's face, and the roses in her cheeks put the poppies to open shame. It was only a fleeting moment.

"It's right handy, Tom, to have plenty in the house, and not have to make a meal's vittles out'n scraps," Viney went on in matter-of-fact tones, without removing the hat. "Pap's awful good to me, Tom, but this won't last. He'll get them other nine thousand, and hit'll go the same way this has gone. Still and all, I can't—I can't—" Tears began to well in her eyes again, but she wiped them away and went on: "I promised you I wouldn't sign nothin' Tom, and I ain't, but— I don't make many promises, and I 'low to keep most of 'em, but— Tom, when Pap asks me to sign them deeds I can't refuse him. He's give his word and give it square and honest. I know he ain't never thought about half of the land bein' mine, like you said. He's old; he's allers kept his word, and hit would nigh about kill him to break it now. I want that you should let me off from that promise I made about signin' papers. I—I——"

Viney dropped the feather fan that she had held in her hand into the box with the cotton gloves, and wiped her eyes. The very poppies on the hat seemed to droop in sympathy for her misery.

"Why, Miss Viney, you didn't make me any promise, particularly," Tom protested. "You just said you wouldn't sign the papers. Anyway, if you had promised me, I'd release you from any promise you made me, that was making you unhappy."

"Thank you, Tom," and there was relief in Viney's tone. "Let me off'm this'n, and you won't never have to let me off again. I won't never make you another promise that I don't aim to keep—always."

Tom's heart skipped a beat, but there was no sign of coquetry in Viney's teary eyes. Nothing but straightforward innocence.

"Get your horse, and I'll show you the way to cross the swamp, 'thout going so far around," she said, when Tom rose to leave a little later. "Then when you come again you can get here a little sooner and stay a little longer."

She still wore her hat as they walked together down the trail, Tom leading his horse. She showed him where the trail entered the swamp, at the sweet gum tree. She showed him the blazes to follow, and the black bog under the leaning sycamore that he must keep away from because it had no bottom. Finally, she brought him out into the road on the other side of the swamp, under the big black walnut tree. Then she extended her hand.

"Goodby, Tom," she said. "Come back when you kin. I'll shore be glad to see you."

As the old plug splashed through the marshy bottom, Tom Stone summed up the situation. The wonderful long-leaf lands from which he had hoped so much were now out of his reach. Smedley had his filthy tentacles on a fortune there, but there was something else on the Bynum tract that Tom had decided was well worth having, besides "virtuous" pine timber. A warm, comfortable feeling came to him at thought of Viney and the sacrifice she was willing to make, in order to save her father from breaking his word.

Then Tom's face flamed, and his eyes flashed with rage at the thought of Sam Smedley robbing these innocent people. He thought how grateful Viney had been for that cheap, tawdry hat and those calico dresses, and of the thousands of times their value Smedley and his hatchet-faced lawyer were robbing her of. Suddenly, he stopped the old plug and shook his ham-like fist at the heavens.

"Damn a man that will rob a woman!" he roared.

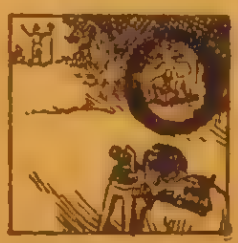
This seemed to relieve him. At least, he rode on thoughtfully across the cut-over land and into town.

That was by no means Tom's last visit to the Bynum cabin. Outstanding among other visits was the Saturday night that he and Dad Bynum spent together on the bayou. When they put out set lines, then sat by the camp-fire, smoking and talking of many things. At daylight they had taken a forty-pound cat off one of the hooks and carried it to the cabin. Viney fried a great dish of the white meat and they feasted. Afterward, Tom and Dad spent most of that Sunday morning walking in the wonderful Bynum Bottoms. Tom explained how a timber-cruiser estimated the value of a forest. They stopped under a giant cypress tree, and after a moment's calculation he told Dad there was three hundred dollars worth of lumber in that one tree.

"I shore sold this land a lot too low, Tom, accordin' to yo' tell, and I don't doubt it none," the old man said. "If I could 'a' talked to you a little sooner it might been different, but hit air too late now. I done give my word."

That was when Tom gave up all hope of thwarting Smedley in his steal of the Bynum lands.

"An honest man may be the noblest work of God, but I don't see why He made the honestest ones the damnedest fools," he muttered to himself as he rode home that night.



IN THE following Monday morning surveyors began running the line for the narrow gauge road to Smedley's mill. It was done in two days, and two gangs began work, one at the town and the other at the mill. Smedley had hung up a prize of five hundred dollars for the gang that reached the halfway point first. The surveyors ran the line straight, and in doing so ran within fifty feet of Laish Taylor's old cabin on the "bandoned land." By chance, the halfway stake was right in front of the cabin door.

Bill Boston was promoted again and put in charge of construction work, beginning at the mill. A mile would cover all the grading on the route. The rest, and particularly on Bill's end, was trestles through the swamp. Steadily the two ends of the road drew together, through the long, hot summer months, while the water was low. Work at the Smedley mill never slackened. Millions of feet from the Holderness tract were being sawed and stacked, against the opening of the road.

The first of August saw Smedley's money gone, but he was in high feather.

He borrowed fifty thousand dollars and gave a blanket mortgage on his holdings. That, he felt, was not asking a favor. It was giving some idle money a job, for the collateral was worth ten times that much. He had nothing to worry about, now. Nothing to do but work, and wait for the harvest.

The big yards at the railroad were finished, and the sign "Smedley Lumber Company," was on roof and sides, in letters four feet long. The planing mill was finished, and the new machinery installed. Sam Smedley was a keen business man, and he knew lumber from the stump to market. He was leaving nothing undone. In the yards at his mill were carloads of the clear hard pine flooring that the whole world was begging for. He had advance orders for all the lumber he could ship in three months with the best of luck. Nothing could stop him now.

Came mid-September and cooler mornings. Just a month now until every gap would be closed. The Bynum tract would be definitely the property of Sam Smedley, which assured timber of the finest for the mills. Another week, now, at most, and a stream of lumber would be pouring over the narrow-gauge road, all in plenty of time to take care of Sam Smedley's financial obligations.

The surveyors and construction gangs had named Laish Taylor's old cabin "Swamp Eagle," and had dubbed it division headquarters. One evening Bill Boston, whose gang was in the lead for the prize money, had his men throw some tools and odds and ends into the cabin.

"Three more days, and a little extra work," he cheered his weary men, "and we'll win that five hundred."

Boston's end of the trestle was then within three hundred yards of the stake at the cabin door, while the other gang was about half a mile away. The next morning, Boston, with some of his men, went to the cabin to get their tools. As they approached the place they saw a thin spiral of smoke issuing from the stick-and-dirt chimney. They also saw their tools and other things in a ragged heap on the ground outside. Standing in the door, the stem of his pipe clenched in his strong, even teeth, stood Tom Stone.

"What the hell are you doin' here?" demanded Boston.

"I live here."

"Oh, you do? Well what d'ye mean throwin' my tools around thataway?"

"What do you mean putting a lot of junk in my house without permission."

"Now, see here, Stone. A joke's all right, sometimes, but we ain't got no time for jokes right now. We got to bring our end of the line up to that stake first in order to win them five hundred dollars prize money, and——"

"Then you'll never win it."

"Hell we won't! Why not?"

"Because this land belongs to me, and I won't permit it. Your last piling is within ten feet of my line. Don't drive any more."

Then Bill Boston lost his head and said things that he wished many times afterward he had not said. Finally, in his rage at the prospect of losing the prize, he used a fighting word, fully intending to back it —and back it he did.

In front of the old cabin was a little plot of bermuda grass. This became a battle ground for two giants. Bill Boston, the larger and stronger man, went in a flame with rage. Tom Stone went in calmly on the defensive and coolly alert for every advantage. He hadn't expected to fight with Boston, whom he knew to be the champion scrapper of the mills. He had thought the big foreman would listen to reason. He had no quarrel with Boston. Sam Smedley was the man he was after.

Boston was the aggressor from the start of the fight. Back and forth they fought, across the plot of grass. Once Boston struck Tom a staggering blow, causing him to reel backward a step. His foot struck the half-way stake, and he fell his length on the ground. Boston sprang forward to jump in Tom's face with his boots, but two of his men caught him and told him he had to fight fair.

"Thank you, boys," said Tom, getting to his feet, one eye half-closed and blood dripping from his face.

From that on the fight was an attempt to murder with bare fists. Weary and panting, the men fought on, each growing weaker. It had begun to look like anybody's fight, and if there had been betting at the ringside there would have been no odds. In the midst of the dogged battling, when blows were coming slower and with less force, it occurred to Tom that after all Bill Boston represented Sam Smedley. The mill owner had hired this man to do his dirty work. A surge of berserker rage came up in Tom's throat. His muscles tensed again. Boston made a wild swing at him, and in that instant some terrific force came up under Boston's chin. His head snapped back; he measured his length

on the ground, and lay quite still.

Half an hour later, Bill Boston sat up on the grass and stared about him. Tom Stone was sitting in the cabin door, bathing his swollen face and hands in a bucket of salt water. The other men, having revived Bill Boston, were standing by and looking on, ready for the next round.

"Do you want any more?" asked Tom, through swollen lips.

"Hell, no! I'm whipped!" Bill tried to grin.

"Glad you've got sense enough to know it. That's one fight you could have got along better without. Now, take your men and your tools, get off my land, and stay off."

"I'll do that, but you better get off, too," growled Boston. "Old Sam Smedley ain't apt to take what I've took."

"He's apt to take a whole lot worse if he tries to build a railroad across my land."

The construction gang took their tools and departed. When they reached the end of their work they saw where Tom had set up a row of blazed stakes, showing his line. Doggedly they stacked their tools and trudged off toward Smedley's mills. Tom went on bathing his bruises. He expected to have Sam Smedley on him within a few hours, but the day passed, night came on, and still no one came from the mill. In the distance, Tom could see the other construction gang pushing forward with their work.

Tom Stone was not to be deceived by this inactivity on Smedley's part. He knew the mill-owner too well, and he also knew the vindictive spirit of Bill Boston. Bill's vanity could never survive the beating he had taken unless he could in some way make reprisal. So, a little while after dark Tom left the cabin and took refuge in a thicket of alders that grew about fifty yards north of the house. Here he crouched and waited. It had not occurred to him to arm himself, other than with his two mighty fists, but as he sat there waiting developments he regretted that he had not done so.

It was near midnight when Tom saw two bulky forms, appearing almost too big for men, approaching from the opposite direction. They disappeared into the shadow of the cabin, moving noiselessly. A little later a match flared, and in its red glare Stone recognized the battered face of Bill Boston, who held the match in his hand, and by the side of it the baggy jowls of Sam Smedley. Boston stooped and placed the lighted match; then the two men turned and walked rapidly away, back toward Smedley's mill.

Thoughtlessly, Tom sprang forward to put out the fire and save the cabin. Just as his foot struck into the pile of rich pine that the two men had stacked against the door, and that had made them look so bulky to Tom, a gun cracked. A bullet fanned by Tom's face and bedded itself in the logs of the cabin. The splinters scattered, and the blaze went out, just as two more bullets spattered against the wall. Tom crouched to the ground, and again bullets whined over his head. After that he could hear the two men walking hurriedly away.

The months of suppressed rage at Sam Smedley now flared to frenzy in Tom Stone's heart. Hell was really beginning to pop as the old timber foreman had said it would when Tom got mad.

OLD JUDGE BINDLEY had a habit of going to his office very early in the morning and afterward going back home to his breakfast. The judge had just entered his office when Tom Stone came in.

"Good mawnin', Tom," drawled the judge. "Why, what the——"

Tom sank into a chair by the battered old table and told the judge of his fight with Bill Boston.

"I'd 'a' give fifty dollars, pore as I am, to have seen that fight—if the other fellow looks any worse than you do. Ho, ho, ho!" roared Judge Bindley.

Then, when Tom told him of the later outrage, the judge didn't laugh.

"Why, Tom, that's plumb serious," he said gravely. "Arson, and assault to murder. That's what it amounts to."

"It'll amount to more than that!" snapped Tom. "Damn Sam Smedley, he can't put that kind of stuff over me. I'm going to get me a gun as soon as the stores open, and——"

"Just a minit, Tom," the judge interrupted. "Sit still and cool some, while I talk a little. First off, I want to tell you that the smartest man in the world is a damn fool when he's mad. Sam Smedley has showed that right plain, and if you wasn't as crazy mad as he is you'd see it. You just keep quiet, and it won't be long until Smedley will see what he's done and come making offers."

"I don't want his offers, damn him! If he wants to shoot it out, I'll accommodate him!"

"Just a minit, Tom," soothed the judge. "That evening when you and Laish Taylor came in here, and you got me to write that deed, and then when it was signed you asked me to put it in my safe and keep it until you called for it, I took a right smart likin' to you. Then when Laish was gone, and you told me about the dirty deal Sam Smedley had given you; told me you just had six dollars left in the world after you had paid Laish three hundred for the land: told me the reason you didn't have no more saved was because you been sending money to yo' old folks; told me, finally, that you was goin' to whip hell out of Sam Smedley at his own game, just with yo' two bare hands, why, I just naturally fell for you, that's all."

Tom began swallowing his wrath at this, and Judge Bindley's recital warmed him to the old fellow.

"Now, Tom, considering everything, you've done right well, but all you have done can be undone in about one little minute. Just let you get a gun. Then meet Sam Smedley, who always carries one, and who is also right riled just now. Smedley kills you, and then where's your whipping you gave him? You kill Smedley, and what chance you got to punish him? The devil may be singeing him, but it won't give you much satisfaction, even if you don't get hung or sent to the pen. Give Smedley a chance, and he'll do what——"

"I tell you, I don't want anything from him!" flared Tom, again. "This is a fight to a finish. He started it, and I'm going to finish it my own way."

"I know, I know, but listen, Tom. If you don't get killed in this mess, you got a long time to live, and you'd like to be happy. A young fellow like you ought to have a home and things thataway. Now, you come on over to the house with me. Eat some breakfast, then let old Aunt Lucy make a poultice of fresh beef and Mederia leaves for them eyes of yo'n. She knows how to do it. She's made many a one for me, when I was a youngster. Then you lie down and sleep a while. You ain't slept a wink since God-knows-when. Come on, let's go, son."

Sullenly Tom rose and followed the old judge out the back door, across the alley, and on to the rambling old house that fronted on the next street.

ABOUT the time Tom, with his eyes poulticed, was dropping off to sleep, a conference was being held in the office of Joe Nelms. There was no laughter and no philosophy about that discussion.

"I thought you told me you had that right-of-way all cinched," stormed Smedley.

"I told you about that strip of abandoned land," replied Nelms. "There was nothing that could be done about it. I couldn't locate Taylor, and all I could learn was that he said he was abandoning it. I have an idea this fellow just squatted on it, thinking abandoned land could be preempted, as it can in some states, or that he could plead squatter-rights. All he wants is a few hundred dollars. Hunt him up and reason with him."

"Reason, hell! You can't reason with him no way, except with a shotgun loaded with dynamite. Tom Stone ain't the dang fool you think he is, unless he's gone crazy since he quit me, and this don't look like it. Let's go over to the clerk's office and look up the records on that land so we'll know where we're at."

Five minutes later, Joe Nelms stood gasping in the clerk's office. On the day before there had been recorded a deed from Laish Taylor to Tom Stone. The deed bore date of May 4, last, and set forth that it conveyed to the said Tom Stone a certain parcel of land, four hundred and eighty varas wide, and two miles long.

"What do you mean by not recording this deed sooner?" snapped Joe Nelms.

The clerk's eyebrows rose in surprise as he looked over his glasses at the lawyer.

"Why, Mr. Nelms, the deed was filed for record three days ago, as the records show," he said. "There is no law in Texas requiring deeds to be recorded. Didn't you know that?"

"You've played hell, Nelms!" roared Smedley.

"I tell you, it don't amount to anything," insisted Nelms. "All you have to do is to see Stone and pay him what you have to for the right-of-way across his land."

"That's all I have to do, eh? Well, that's going to be a plenty."

"I reckon he's human," offered Nelms.

"Yes, that's the worst trouble. He's too damned human. Let's get out of here, where we can talk sense."

Out in the court-house yard Smedley stood pawing the red sand with his feet, like an enraged bull.

"What I need now is a lawyer, instead of a damned Jack-in-the-box!" he bellowed at Nelms. "You ain't got sense enough to pack water to a crippled jackass."

"That may be true," said Nelms, complacently, "but I've done considerable work for you that few other lawyers would have done. In this connection, I want to call your attention to the fact that the Bynum sales contract matures October fifteenth, and you must pay nine thousand dollars at that time or lose the thousand you've already paid. Also, on October tenth, there is another thousand due on the Holderness stumpage, and that must be paid or——"

"Oh, go—to—hell!" roared Smedley. "Stand there and tell me things I already know, instead of doing something to save me from absolute ruin. There's a mortgage on my plant and stock of lumber for fifty thousand dollars, and it's due October fifteenth, too. Not only that, but money is tight as the hinges of hell, and the bank has already notified me that they won't extend the note. Show me a way to get my road across that four hundred and eighty varas of land, and I'll put enough lumber here in a week to pay everything."

"I told you one way. See Stone and pay him what he wants. Another way would be to go right ahead and build your road, then let him sue for damages. That would really be——"

"You haven't seen Bill Boston, have you?"

"Not lately. Why?"

"You ought to take a look at him; then you'd get an idea what the man would look like who undertook to go right ahead and build that road across Stone's land."

"I told you—" began Nelms.

"Yes, and I told you to go to hell! I'm going to hunt up a lawyer that's got some sense."

TOM STONE ate his breakfast and submitted to Aunt Lucy's poultice. When he had gone to sleep, Judge Bindley went back to his office. There was no laughter in the old fellow's eyes, now. He was confronted with a serious problem. He had only staved off the promised tragedy temporarily. Tom Stone's anger was deep and relentless. The judge wondered that the young fellow could harbor such a frightful grudge against Smedley just on account of the crooked lumberman ordering him to steal. Tom's was a rage that might sleep while he slept, but it would flare up again as soon as he woke. In his present state of mind, nothing but Smedley's life would satisfy him.

On the other hand, Smedley, greedy to the last extreme, had almost had his hands on a cold million, and now he faced utter ruin at Tom Stone's hands. If the two men met, one of them would be killed—perhaps both of them. There would be no thought of compromise in Tom's mind, even if Smedley came begging for it. Nothing short of the utter crushing of Smedley's business, even if he didn't take the lumberman's life, would ever satisfy Tom. How to keep the men apart until they cooled a little, was the problem. Or rather, until Smedley cooled—Tom Stone never would.

The old judge was pondering these things when Sam Smedley stepped into his office.

"Judge, I need a good lawyer!" he said, without other greeting.

"Yes? Been needing one some time, ain't you, Mr. Smedley?"

"Yes, but I didn't know it. Tom Stone has got my railroad tied up, and I want to employ you to get the matter settled."

"Sorry, but I'm counsel for the other side of that controversy."

"What other side?"

"Why, the other side. There's always two sides to a controversy."

"I'll pay you to represent me."

"Mr. Stone will pay me to represent him."

"What's he got to pay with? What's he got at stake, anyway?"

"Why, everything he's got is at stake, same as everything you got is at stake. His all is the same to him as yo' all is to you."

"Oh, hell! I haven't got time to listen to such damned nonsense as that. I'll give you five thousand dollars to settle this mess with your client and let me go on with my road."

"And I wouldn't suggest it to him for five million. Besides that, he wouldn't settle your way for five billions. Tom's sorter mad at you, Mr. Smedley."

"Oh, dammit, talk sense!"

"Fine! I been waiting for you to ask me to do that. Just sit still and behave yourself. I think I'm in a position to do you more good than any other lawyer on

earth could do you, and still do no violence to my own client."

"Well, get to business!" snapped Smedley. "I can't wait all day."

"All right. In the first place, I want you to get two things fixed in your mind. One is that I'm going to tell you the truth, even if it bleeds. The other is that all the money you got, and all you think you're going to get, don't make you look like no booger to me."

Smedley swallowed hard, but he managed to hold his tongue.

"Now then," continued the judge, "here's the statement of facts that you and me have got to take as a basis for whatever we do. Us squirrel-hunters are pretty good, plain, honest, mill-run folks. We quarrel some among ourselves, but when an outsider jumps on one of us, he jumps on all of us. You've jumped on several—pretty hard. In the first place, you and that jack-leg lawyer that you sent on ahead of you to smell things out robbed poor Frank Thompson out of his sawmill. In the next place, you made a dishonorable and dishonest proposal to the best timber-cruiser in Texas, and he quit you, just as any other white man would have done. In the next place, you brought a logging foreman to town, said he was a timber-cruiser, and had him swear a lie in making an affidavit to falsified figures on the Holderness stumpage. Then——"

"I'll be damned if I stand for any more of that!" roared Smedley, springing to his feet.

"There's just one more item; you better hear it. It might save you a lot of trouble, and it doesn't cost you a cent."

"Go ahead," growled Smedley, resuming his seat.

"Last night you and Bill Boston went to Tom Stone's home and tried to set fire to his house. Then, when he went to put it out, you fired several shots at him. That constitutes assault to murder, and arson, a pretty grave——"

"I deny——"

"It won't do no good to deny it. Tom was within fifty yards of you and saw you and Bill both when the match was struck. Besides that, there's a man at the cabin now, keeping things in *statu quo*. More than that, a man has just come back from there, and he says yo'n and Bill Boston's tracks are plumb plain in the soft ground at the edge of the bermuda grass, where you stopped to do the shooting. Couldn't mistake them tracks. Bill Boston has got the biggest human foot in the Neches Bottom, and not many grown men have got as small feet as you have. That's all. Now then, maybe I can tell you how to settle it."

"I lost my head, Judge," said Smedley. "I'll admit that, but who wouldn't have lost his head. A million dollars in sight, and have that fellow block the game that way and try to ruin me. I've worked like a slave on this proposition, and——"

"Yes, you've worked pretty hard. If you'd come in here and bought an interest with Frank Thompson and furnished Frank some business brains, there'd have been a fortune in it for both of you, run square and right, but you didn't do that."

"I can see I've been a fool, Judge, and I'm willing to pay for my folly. Tell me what to do. If all these charges are pressed against me now, I'll be ruined."

"Oh, you'll be ruined anyway, if losing everything you've got will ruin you. Tom Stone set out to ruin you. You took a few shots at Tom last night when he was unarmed. First sight he has of you he's going to pay them shots back, and he ain't going to wait for you to begin. You can't blame him. Don't but four people know about the arson and attempt to murder, besides you and Bill Boston. I don't reck'n either of you is apt to talk, and I'll manage to keep the others quiet for the present, if you do what I advise. Of course, if the grand jury finds out and begins to investigate, that's something else."

"Tell me what your proposal is," demanded Smedley, white to the lips.

"Why, it's this. I'll give you fifty thousand dollars for all your holdings in this county, and I'll pay the fifty thousand to the Lumbermen's National Bank and take up your note. That——"

"Like hell you will! All you'd have to do would be to build four hundred and eighty varas of road, and you'd have a hundred thousand dollars worth of lumber on the market."

"Yes, that's true too, but that lumber is worth just exactly four-bits on the other side of that swamp, and you can't build that four hundred and eighty varas of road in four hundred and eighty years, because Tom Stone is going to kill you if you try it—and he'll come clear if he kills you."

Sweating from every pore, Smedley crouched in his chair, his greedy soul in torment.

"My God, man! Be human," he pleaded.

"This ain't my case. I'm representing Tom Stone, and I'm offering you more than he would sanction. You ain't got no call to expect him to be human in dealing

with you. Anyway, was you human when you broke poor Frank Thompson, one of the best men God ever made. Was you human when you stole the stumpage off the Holderness land. Was you human when you and that shark-billed, jack-leg lawyer of yo'n tried to steal two hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of timber from poor, ignorant old Tobe Bynum and his orphan daughter. Was you ever human? I've made my talk. It's up to you, and a wasted minute may mean your life, for Tom Stone is going to hunt for you."

"But I'll be broke. Ruined!"

"Yes, but you'll be alive, if you hurry. If I was in your place I'd sign that deed, and then I'd get out of Texas as quick as a train traveled through here. Also, if you think anything of Joe Nelms, you'll advise him to go with you."

IT WAS almost sunset when Judge Bindley wobbled across the alley to his home. Tom Stone had just awakened and was out on the long gallery at the side of the house splashing cold water over his face and neck. The judge sat down in a chair.

"Aunt Lucy, bring me a toddy, and make it stiff," he called.

He drank the toddy slowly, when it came, and then set the glass on the window ledge.

"Come here, Tom, and sit down," he commanded. Then, when Tom Stone was by his side, he went on: "I've played poker some, and I've bluffed a little, but this has been the hardest day of my life—I think. I won the pot, but I was scared to death all the time."

"Have you seen anything of Sam Smedley?" and rage flamed in Tom's eyes again.

"Yes, I saw him, and I don't reck'n I'll ever see him again. He left on the train about an hour ago. Read them," and he handed Tom a package of papers, chief among which was a deed from Sam Smedley to the Stone-Thompson Lumber Company to all his holdings in that county.

"But," said Tom, when at last he understood what had happened, and that Smedley was completely crushed, "where do you come in on this."

"Oh, I've been right mercenary—for me. I'll collect ten thousand dollars that I loaned Frank Thompson on a plain note of hand and that he never could have paid if it hadn't been for this."

Then Judge Bindley began to laugh, for the first time since that morning.

"Tom," said he, between gales of laughter, "he was the worst skeered man I've seen since I tried old Doc McWhorter's nigger, Mage, for stealing a gourdful of soft soap." Then he grew serious. "But, now, Tom, the fun's all over, and you and Frank Thompson have got to work like hell, or we'll all be ruined. I ain't got no fifty thousand to pay that note on the fifteenth of October. If it ain't paid, the bank will foreclose on the whole works and take it away from you. You got to slam up that gap in the road, and get that lumber moving. I guess old Tobe Bynum has had more fun out of this little mess than anybody else. He's had one hell of a spree of spending on that thousand dollars, even if the contract wasn't worth the paper it was written on. I was to see Tobe the other day. We went squirrel hunting. He spotted me three and beat me five!"

"I don't know how I'm ever going to thank you for this, Judge," said Tom. "If it hadn't been for you, I'd have had Sam Smedley's blood on my hands by this time, and I don't want my hands bloody."

"No, I reck'n not. You don't owe me no thanks. You worked four-five months and done all the rough stuff. I just worked one day. But there's one little thing I'd like to say to you. Frank Thompson knows all about machinery and is a first class mill-man, but he ain't got no business sense. That's why I put you at the head of the firm when I organized it. There's only one trouble——"

"What's that, Judge?"

"Why, being an old bachelor myself, I've come to the conclusion they ain't worth a damn for anything—hardly, let alone the head of a big lumber company."

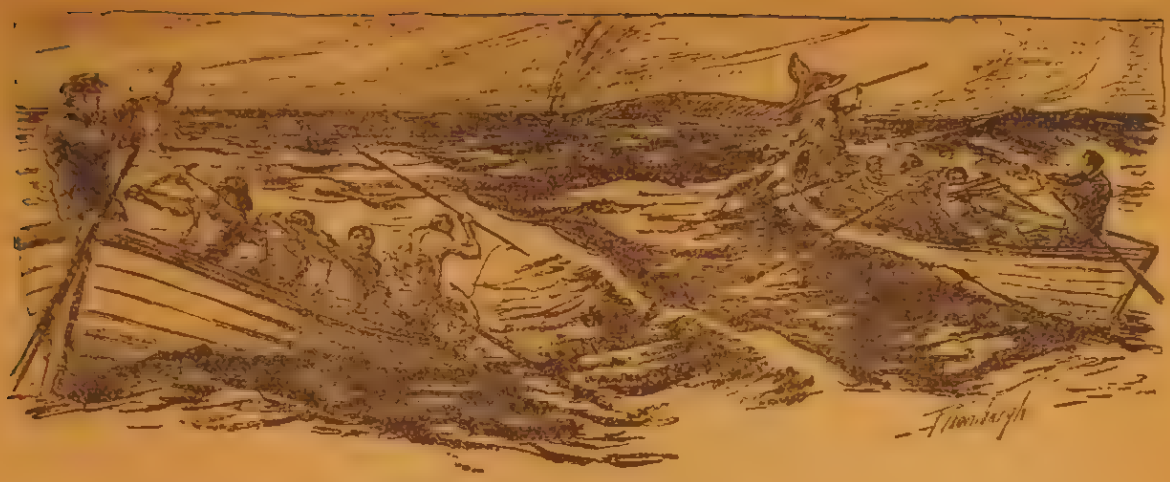
Tom Stone grinned until he cracked his sore lip.

"Would Saturday be soon enough?" he asked.

"Shore!"

"All right. Meet us at the court-house Saturday afternoon. I guess Viney can get ready by that time."

"What! Viney Bynum! Why, Tom, she's the prettiest girl in the Neches Bottoms and can make the best squirrel stew. That cinches yo' sawing the "virtuous" pine of them wonderful long-leaf lands. You lucky whelp. Come on. Aunt Lucy's callin' us to supper."



A CUPID IN SEA BOOTS

By JAMES K. WATERMAN

Author of "The Sea Fox Returns," "Breachin' Bill," etc.

A grand battle it was that Cap'n Bob Heldare jumped into when he stepped up to uphold the dignity of sperm whalers—a battle that was to have significance far beyond any of his roaring career.

WITH his hat perched precariously over his starboard ear the gristly old mate of the whaling bark *Stormy Petrel* lurched unsteadily out of the Flying Flukes Saloon about eight-thirty on a Wednesday night. He stood on the sidewalk of the main street of Jamestown, Island of St. Helena, cursing fervently under his breath and contemplating his bruised knuckles by the glowing light of the South Atlantic moon.

"What the devil's up now, Sam Hocker?" inquired a familiar voice at his elbow. Swinging around, the mate found himself looking into the keen hazel eyes of a determined looking man about thirty, as straight as a lance, and possessing a pair of noticeably wide shoulders, that promised physical power and endurance unusual even for a New Bedford whaling skipper.

A pleased grunt issued from the lean throat of Mr. Hocker as he recognized his skipper, Cap'n Bob Heldare, who as ill-luck would have it, happened to be passing. The mate's weather-faded blue eyes brightened.

"Scud me under a marlinspike, Cappen!" he exploded. "If ye ain't come along jest at the right time. Thar's a sky-scrapin' son of a dogfish in that—" he jerked a thumb at the saloon door—"that tried to ride me down like a main tack. An' bust me ef he didn't come mighty nigh doin' it, too!"

He paused and, holding his battered hands before his face, surveyed them ruefully. Cap'n Bob, well aware of his mate's belligerent inclinations when he had a few horns under his belt, regarded him with a tolerant smile.

"My flippers went to pieces ag'in that cast-iron phiz o' his'n," supplemented the mate. "Ef my hands had been's good as they was when me an' you was afore the mast together an' we useter fight jest for the fun o' it I'd a-trimmed that thar sculpin's sheets to the queen's taste. I would so, Cappen!"

"I should think, Mr. Hocker," Cap'n Bob admonished, with assumed severity, "that before you go looking for trouble you'd remember that your hands won't stand the gaff like they did in those days. But what started you, anyhow?"

With an aggrieved look Mr. Hocker avowed that he hadn't been looking for trouble. No, indeed. Far from it. He had merely drifted into the Flying Flukes to have a quiet drink when his eyes had happened to fall on a shaggy sea-bear of a man whose feet were encased in a pair of the thickest and largest sea boots he had ever seen in all his born days. Wearing them in the tropics, too, mind you. The mate must have shown his surprise, for the

wearer of the tremendous footwear immediately shot out the assertion that sperm whalemen weren't worth a damn. The tropic sun dried all the guts out of them after a few voyages, thereby rendering them unfit for anything but mild home duty, such as spearing eels or digging clams.

"An' blow me fer a grampus!" stormed the mate. "Seein' as how the cuss was lookin' at me when he said it like a sailor would at a marine caught stealin' his tobacker, I felt duty bound, d'ye see, Cappen, to show my colors. So I sailed inter him like a Baltimore clipper a-goin' large. But it didn't take me more'n a leetle less than a minnit to diskiver that I'd boarded a craft that was all fists from clew to earrin'. So I has to sheer off like a wounded porpoise, the customers all a-laffin', an' him a-hollerin' arter me to bring on some more o' my sun-stewed sparm whalers. Ain't that a hell of a note, Cappen?"

Ever a man of quick impulses and determined resolution, the look of mild interest in Cap'n Bob Heldare's eyes changed gradually, until by the time the mate had finished they were snapping like sparks from glowing iron.

"H—mm! So that's the way of it, eh!" snorted the skipper. "And he wore big grain-leather sea boots, did he? Must be one of them south-of-the-Horn sealers, or an Arctic bowheader homeward bound. They think they're a notch or two better than sperm whalers, by all accounts." He paused and stepped one side as two rollicking boatsteerers came along, each towing a pretty, giggling "yamstock" girl, and stood snapping the ball of his thumb over the forefinger until they passed, his brows knitted into a black frown. Finally he nodded with the air of a man who has made up his mind to right a wrong.

"Come in and show me this man, Sam!" he said in a tone of deadly calmness.

AS CAP'N BOB HELDARE and his mate strode into the barroom, well lighted by hanging lamps, a whaleman seated at one of the tables near the door took one amazed look at the skipper, and, hastily gulping down his drink, rose to his feet.

"Hell's riz, now, Zack!" he leaned over the table and whispered to his companion. "That's that mate ag'in an' damme ef he ain't brung Cap'n Heldare back with him, that hurricane cuss, ye remember, that I, the heavyweight champion of the whole fleet to a forty round draw one Fourth o' July. The fiercest an' bloodiest battle New Bedford ever see, the papers said. Shake a leg an' let's blow. This ain't goin' to be no place for a person's son." And with one apprehensive backward glance they scuttled through the door.

The flurry among the dozen or so patrons resulting from Mr. Hocker's brief encounter with the Unknown had died down and they were seated at their respective tables sipping drinks and chatting when of a sudden they too caught sight of the mate and his tall, rangy companion. Words died suddenly on their lips and awed expectancy was depicted on their faces as they glanced first at the mate and then at the Unknown leaning against the bar. The latter, a man about forty, was in all truth a regular bear of a man. And Cap'n Bob, as he ranged up alongside with his six feet of height and two hundred of weight, looked small in comparison.

However, a man with heavy white mustaches and an unmistakable military bearing, a surgeon-major in mufti belonging to the English regiment stationed on the island, studying the two men carefully, decided that the bigger man was muscle-bound.

Cap'n Bob, at a nudge from his mate and a whispered, "That's him," gave the Unknown a swift appraising glance. He noted that his clothes were of the best pilot cloth, the trousers of which, an unusual thing for that climate, were tucked into the tops of the largest and heaviest sea boots Cap'n Bob's eyes had ever rested on.

Nodding familiarly to the bartender, the skipper called for a bottle of beer, split. As the drinks were served the Unknown twirled his glass of rum and lime-juice between a carroty thumb and forefinger and, turning, disclosed to Cap'n Bob a broad, weather-beaten visage, the lower part of which was shrouded in a heavy black beard. His eyes, blue and cold as the January ice on the north side of a pond, bored into the skipper's for a long moment and, shifting over to Mr. Hocker, took on a distinctly hostile gleam.

Apparently Cap'n Bob paid no attention.

"Anyone out in the yard, Andy?" he accosted the bartender after slowly drinking his beer.

The yard was a small plot of ground in the rear, surrounded by a high stone wall, where whalemen frequenting the Flying Flukes were wont to retire to settle their

disputes. With a searching look at the skipper the bartender went to a door in the back and peered through.

"There's no one there, Captain Heldare," he said.

As he called the skipper by name the eyes of the Unknown flickered strangely, while the skin about his nostrils folded into a wrinkle of surprise. But Cap'n Bob, busy picking his change from the bar after paying for the drinks, appeared not to notice it.

Pocketing his change, Cap'n Bob swung suddenly so as to face the Unknown, whose rugged features seemed to steel themselves as if sensing that war was brewing.

"My mate here, Mister," began Cap'n Bob, his manner deliberate, but his tone vibrant with eager animosity, "tells me you're looking for some sun-stewed sperm whalers. How about it?" The last three words clashed like the links of a chain.

THE eyes of the Unknown lighted with two flares of fierce joy. He smiled wickedly, surveyed the skipper from head to foot with a malignant gaze and, raising his glass to his mouth, emptied it in two gulps.

"That's what I said, Mister!" blazed the Unknown, slamming his glass down, his big sea boots ringing on the floor as he sprang back clear of the bar, his eyes shooting blue flame. "Perhaps you'd like some o' what I gave your mate!"

"Now, gentlemen," interposed the gray-haired bartender placatingly, "what do you say to a little drink on the house and forget the argument?"

Neither paid him the slightest attention. The Tropics had met the Arctic and there was naturally bound to be a clash.

"Not here, sir," rejoined Cap'n Bob calmly, though the hairs on the back of his neck bristled. "There ain't hardly sea room for them boots of yours. There's a back yard out there——"

"Three quid to ten bob on Sea Boots to win!" piped a half-drunken Cockney second mate. "Who'll tyke me?" He looked about over the tables.

"I'll take you!" snapped the surgeon-major, reaching for his purse. With the aid of a third party the bet was made.

"That gives me an idea!" flashed Cap'n Bob, who had heard the wager.

Digging down into his pockets, he produced a handful of gold and silver which he laid on the bar. He looked at the little heap a moment and unfastened his gold chain and watch and placed them beside the money.

"Put your pile against mine," he challenged the sperm whaler, "and I'll endeavor to prove to you that the tropics ain't taken the guts out of all of us by a damn' sight. How does that suit ye, Sea Boots?"

"I'm as tickled as an Injun with a sackful o' scalps!" rumbled the Unknown. "Here's mine!" He pulled out his money and put it beside the other. "Ain't quite as much value as yourn," he debated, appraising the other's money and watch, "but I guess this here—" he pulled out a magnificent gold hunting-case watch, looked at it earnestly and with a hoarse chuckle unhooked the chain from his vest and placed it on the bar, "will even things up. But I tell ye right now, young feller, I wouldn't risk that turnip if I wasn't mighty sure of gettin' it back again, an' that's the truth."

"Enough said. That remains to be seen," countered Cap'n Bob crisply. "Take care of this stuff, bartender, and give it to the one that comes back first out of the yard. Come on, sir!"

In another half-minute the combatants, their faces set like flint, went out into the yard. The bartender with a hopeless shrug of the shoulders, locked the door behind them. Some of the patrons who had seen how easily the man in the big sea boots had defeated the mate began offering bets of three to one that he would trim the other in less than ten minutes. The sporting surgeon-major and Mr. Hocker covered them all.

Ten minutes passed, and the latter two collected. Another ten passed, and yet another ten, and the patrons began crowding about the door straining their ears to catch some sound that would indicate which way the battle was going. Nine minutes more and there came a fumbling knock at the door. Everyone drew back in a fever of expectancy as they watched the bartender insert the key and swing the door open. A deep murmur of amazement followed this movement.

TUMBLING into the room came Cap'n Bob Heldare, one eye completely buried beneath purple, swollen lids, the other gleaming wildly from the midst of his bruised and bloody features. His shirt hung in strings about a

splendid torso, the skin of which had been pounded into the semblance of raw beef. Steadying himself against the end of the bar, he dragged a decanter of brandy from the shelf and, holding it to his puffed lips, took a regular Cape Horn snifter and set the decanter back with a steady hand.

"Never mind me!" he sputtered, taking the wet towel the bartender handed him and beginning to mop his face. "See to Sea Boots out there. I tried to bring him to so's we could shake hands and come in together. But I couldn't. He's the best I ever saw—nearly had me licked twice. Tend to him quick."

Mr. Hocker took the towel from the skipper's hand, dipped it in water and sponged the latter's face for a minute or two.

"That'll do till we get aboard ship, Sam," he mumbled. "Thanks. Let's see how our friend is getting on!"

They followed the crowd out into the yard.

Sea Boots was lying under the brilliant rays of the full moon, unconscious and barely breathing, huddled on the spot where he had crashed after receiving a sense-destroying uppercut to the jaw. In falling his head had come in contact with the edge of a half-buried flower pot near the wall and he had sustained a severe scalp wound.

The surgeon-major bent over him for a little while, then rose and gave some order to a soldier standing near. The latter saluted and vanished. The surgeon-major sidled up to Cap'n Bob, who had found his coat and was putting it on.

"Er—pardon me, but you are a ship captain, I presume?" he said.

"Yes, sir. Master of the whaling bark *Stormy Petrel*."

The surgeon-major's heavy mustache lifted in a smile.

"You seem to be a proper skipper for a ship of that name, by Jove. Do you know this man you fought?"

"Don't know him from Adam's off ox," replied the skipper. "Who is he, anyhow?"

"Nobody seems to know. The bartender says he never saw him until two hours ago. Some captain whose ship got in late this afternoon probably." The surgeon-major looked around and stepped closer to the big whaleman and lowered his voice. "I say, Captain, this might get you into a rather nasty mess. Court proceedings and all that, y'know. This man has the appearance of being severely injured. I've sent for the stretcher to take him to the hospital. He may be there for some time, which means that your ship will be detained here indefinitely. Very awkward y'know!"

"Awkward as hell, sir!" agreed Cap'n Bob, who had been listening with ever increasing dismay as the surgeon summed up the situation.

"Now," continued the surgeon-major, "I'm not advising you or interfering in any way, merely suggesting that all inconveniences arising from this situation could be avoided by leaving port instantly. Up anchor and away. We'll take care of the man."

"Yes, sir," acquiesced the skipper, rubbing his aching jaw. "I guess that's the best way out of it. Damn the luck," he added mentally. "Here I've only arrived in port from a cruise on the 12-40 grounds (Latitude 12N; Longitude 40W) three hours ago and now I got to go to sea again."

What was even worse, he reflected, was to be compelled to leave port without getting his letter from Rose Russell. The letter, due on the schooner *Lottie Beard*, a whaling tender running between New Bedford and St. Helena, would tell whether her father had consented to let her marry Cap'n Bob; and if so, whether she could come to Cape Town—at which port the *Stormy Petrel* would call in five months. There the ceremony could be performed. The *Lottie Beard* was expected to arrive any hour now, yet he could not wait for her. To sail meant five months more of torturing suspense before he learned the outcome of Rose's letter, written from New Bedford to her father in Kamchatkan waters, telling of her engagement to Cap'n Bob and asking the consent to their marriage.

"Here's some of my orderlies coming to take this man to the hospital," whispered the surgeon-major. "Goodby and a pleasant voyage."

Thanking him heartily, Cap'n Bob and hit mate slipped through the nearly deserted barroom and hurried down to the landing place, where the skipper engaged a boatman to take them off to the vessel.

With his broad shoulders bowed Cap'n Bob sat in the stern sheets and gloomed at the bottom-boards as the boat went skimming over the moonlit water. It was plain hell, he reflected over and over again, to have to sail without hearing a word from Rose. But if he stayed and the ship was delayed on account of this mess, as it

undoubtedly would be, he would lose his command. No owner would tolerate a skipper, blameless or not, who had been the means of keeping his ship from pursuing her voyage. And this was his first command.

When nearly to his ship he was roused by the noise of an anchor chain roaring through a hawsepipe, which echoed over the quiet harbor as the sound waves rebounded from the granite head. A little exclamation of joy escaped from his puffed lips as he saw that a three masted schooner had come to anchor about a cable's length outside of the *Stormy Petrel.*

"The *Lottie Beard's* in, sir!" announced Mr. Hocker.

SEE. There's a chance to get our mail yet. I'll go aboard my ship and then you take the boat and go over to the schooner for our letters," said Bob eagerly.

In a few minutes they were alongside the gangway. Cap'n Bob was about to grasp the manropes when the mate shoved a cigar box into his hand.

"Careful ye don't drop it, sir!" he cautioned.

"What the devil's in it?" rasped the skipper, his nerves worn to a frazzle by the events of the evening.

"Yer winnin's. The bartender put 'em in the box an' give it to me for ye."

"Damnation! I'd clean forgot it. All right. Hurry over to the schooner, now. Give my compliments to Captain Markand, but say nothing about what's happened. You understand!"

He clambered up the ship's side and the boat shoved off. Cap'n Bob watched it for a little, lamenting the fact that his battered condition prevented him from going himself and having a talk with Captain Markand. For Rose had lived in New Bedford with the Marklands since her mother's death five years ago.

Drawing a deep breath Cap'n Bob went below, pausing outside the second mate's door to instruct him to call all hands and heave short on the chain, as they would get under way as soon as Mr. Hocker returned. Going into his own cabin, the skipper surveyed himself in the glass.

"Holy mackerel!" he ejaculated. "I'm mighty glad Rose isn't here to see me now." The next twenty minutes he was busily occupied in bathing and dressing his numerous injuries.

This done, and arrayed in a clean suit of white duck, he left the room and glanced up at the clock under the skylight. It was ten-twenty. He saw the cigar box lying on the table and was about to open it when he heard the boat bump against the gangway. And the next moment there came floating down to his ears a musical and distinctly feminine laugh.

Puzzled, Cap'n Bob stepped to the open door leading into the forward cabin and stood listening, a sudden apprehension tightening the strings of his heart. He heard Mr. Hocker talking to someone and the mate was answered by a voice which the skipper, considering his present condition, knew only too well. It was the voice of his betrothed—Rose Russell.

"Please don't bother, Mr. Hocker. I'll run down and take him by surprise!"

Cap'n Bob had no chance to recover from his amazement, for the next moment a slim, willowy, brown-haired girl, whose blue eyes mirrored such a wealth of kindliness that no one even noticed her nose was a little irregular, came bounding into the cabin. With a little gurgle of joy she was about to throw herself into his arms when she caught sight of the numerous patches of court plaster on his face and his livid, swollen eye.

"O-h-h-h!" she gasped, recoiling with a shudder. "Bob! Bob, what have you been doing?" Recovering, she stepped up to him and laid a hand on his arm. "You promised me, Bob dear, that after that terrible battle with the champion, that you'd never fight again!" she added in a voice of mingled commiseration and dismay. "And now—" A tear glistened on the thick lashes.

"I—I don't think you'll blame me, Rose dear," he stammered, "when you hear the circumstances. But tell me first how you come to be here." He led her to the transom sofa and stood looking down on her his back to the swinging center light.

"I came out on the *Lottie Beard* with Captain Markand and his wife. They're in the boat alongside now. They wouldn't come aboard with me, said two were company; and, gracious, I'm glad now they didn't." She took one of his big hands and laid her soft cheek against it. "I've a wonderful surprise for you, dear, but I'll say no more till you tell me what happened. Did you—did you beat him, Bob?"

"Her father's consented to our marriage!" Cap'n Bob told himself, his pulses leaping. For how otherwise could her presence be accounted?

"Yes, I got a little the best of him. But I had a mighty hard time doing it, as you can judge." He told her about it. How a stranger had beaten his mate and insulted all sperm whalemen by asserting that they were some degrees lower than a clamdigger. How he had merely followed the unwritten law that a skipper must stand by his officers under any and all circumstances. Rose, knowing how dearly Cap'n Bob loved a fight, smiled to herself as she went to the rack against the mizzen mast and poured a glass of water from the carafe. After drinking it she stood with one hand resting on the table, a half-proud, half-pitying look in her eyes.

"But," Cap'n Bob went on, "seems this man is hurt pretty bad. So bad they took him to the hospital. And to prevent the ship from being held here a month or more I must sail immediately. They're heaving short, now."

"You mean you're going to sail right away!" cried Rose.

"I must, dear. There's no other way out of it if I'm to keep command of the ship. The owners would never stand for the delay."

She was a whaleman's daughter and she understood. She nodded mutely, her hand straying absently to the cigar box and lifting the cover nervously up and down while her distressed eyes roved about the cabin as if seeking some other solution to the difficulty.

"Come, Rose, make up your mind!" implored Cap'n Bob. "Come with me. Your father must have given his consent or you wouldn't be here now. That was your wonderful surprise, wasn't it? I'll take the ship to the south of the island and we'll have the minister at Sandy Bay marry us and we're off. We can write your father about it when we go into Cape Town five months from now. Will you marry me now, Rose dear?"

She wavered, blushed, and lowered her gaze to the table. He was advancing, his arms outstretched, when he saw her suddenly go white as she held the cigar box open and stared down at the watch Cap'n Bob had won from Sea Boots. He heard the quick intake of her breath as she picked it up, stared at the case for a long moment and then opened the back.

"Where did you get this watch?" she asked suddenly, turning to him, her eyes steadily accusing.

Cap'n Bob's big frame squirmed visibly. Rose had forgiven him for fighting, but with her abhorrence of gambling would she forgive this betting transaction? But, resolving to make a clean breast of the whole miserable episode, he told her just how the watch came into his possession.

Her eyes were fixed on him in horror as he finished.

"You—you took this watch from the man—the man you beat so—so that he had to be sent to the hospital. Oh, gracious God!"

The watch slipped from her nerveless grasp and would have fallen to the carpet had not the skipper adroitly caught it and placed it on the table.

"Yes, but, Rose, it was a square deal. I know I oughtn't done it but——"

"He made a step toward her, utterly at a loss to account for her taking the matter so hard.

"Don't—don't touch me please, Bob," she quavered.

She retreated, her slim body swaying like a flower in a gale, to the sofa and, burying her face in her hands, burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, Bob, Bob, Bob!" she sobbed. "That is Dad's watch!"

FOR some minutes an uncanny stillness pervaded the cabin, save for the faint *clank-clank* of the windlass as the chain came in and the slap of the tide against the ship's counter. Rose offered a broken sob now and then. Cap'n Bob, himself, had been struck speechless. Had the heel of the mizzen mast suddenly left the keelson and come soaring up through the cabin, he could not have been more thunderstruck.

Finally, shaking himself, he found his voice.

"Your father's watch!"

"Ye-es! I knew it at once—the harpoon and lance crossed over the whale's head engraved on the case—his name in the back. Oh, it's Dad you've nearly killed!" She started up wildly. "He's in the hospital—and I waste time here!"

Without a look at him, without so much as a farewell, Rose snatched up the watch, darted through the forward cabin and up the companionway to the deck.

Cap'n Bob made no attempt to stop her or go with her. What was the use? Mr. Hocker would show her over the rail. With her thoughts on her father in the hospital Cap'n Bob felt that his presence would only serve to aggravate her feelings.

After a little while Cap'n Bob shook his head sadly. Going on deck, he stood by the rail watching the boat, by then a hundred yards or more away. He could see plainly, however, in the milky moonlight, a pathetic little figure huddled with bowed head between the bulky forms of Captain Markand and his wife. The bowed head never raised as he gazed; she never looked back.

Walking the poop with long, nervous strides Cap'n Bob tried to piece together some of the segments of his world, which had come crashing so suddenly about his ears. How the devil did Cap'n Ben Russell happen to be in St. Helena, when Rose had told Cap'n Bob five months ago that her father was in Kamchatkan waters, nearly fifteen thousand good sea miles from home? Was this the wonderful surprise Rose talked of? And anyway, if Cap'n Ben Russell had already consented to Rose's marriage, he must have known that he was fighting his prospective son-in-law, for the bartender had called the *Stormy Petrel's* skipper by name loud enough for the whole roomful to hear. What was Cap'n Ben Russell up to?

"Chain's up an' down, sir!" roared Mr. Hocker for the third time from the fo'c'sle head.

"Right! Set tops'ls, then break her out. Fill away on the port tack, Mr. Hocker. And send a man to the wheel!"

Twenty minutes later the *Stormy Petrel,* her sails contoured into rounded canvas shells by a smashing southeast breeze, was cutting through the long, irregular shadow cast over the harbor by that huge, sombre pile of rock known as Ladder Hill.

The breeze steadily increased until by eight bells, midnight, it was blowing half a gale. The second mate, coming on deck to relieve Mr. Hocker, found the ship swinging t'gallant-s'ls and tearing along like a racehorse with three feet of green water in her lee scuppers, her decks slanted like the roof of a barn, and the spray flying over her knightheads clear to the rovings of the fore lower tops'l.

"What'n hell's the Old Man tryin' to do, turn the ole gal over?" growled the second mate, working his way up to the binnacle and casting his eyes aloft at the straining canvas and the sullen clouds racing across the face of the moon.

"Damn' if I know!" grated Mr. Hocker, looking at the tall figure leaning against the weather topmast backstay. "But I've an idee this here suits the skipper's mood." He lowered his voice to a confidential tone. "Him an' his gal must 'a' had a row. She had both eye-pumps a-goin' in great shape when I showed her over the rail. An' he never come up to see her off the ship. He never told me nothin', but I guess Miss Russell tore inter him about fightin'. He sure looked a sight an' no mistake!"

"Ah t'hell!" rumbled the tough second. "There's plenty o' gals, but ships like this is hard to find. Hope he don't run the ole gal under!" he added, as she scooped in the top of a foaming green one over her lee cat-head.

"No fear. The Old Man knows his ship. Been second mate an' mate o' her afore he was made skipper. He knows what she can stan', d'ye see. Course is sou'west by west, Mr. Knolls, an' the orders is not to take in no sail without consulting the skipper."

Mr. Hocker went below and turned in. When he came on deck at four o'clock he found that the wind had moderated a little, and in the pale light of the descending moon he saw the form of his skipper still leaning against the backstay.

"Had a hell of a ripsnorter o' a squall shortly after four bells the second informed the mate. "I asked the Old Man should I take in the t'gallant-s'ls an' he never even looked at me. Jest waved me away, an' about that time the squall hit us. Holy jiggers, I never see such carryin' on sence tar an' oakum come into fashion! My hair fair riz. But, by godfrey, dinged if the ole gal didn't seem to like it. Lay down to that squall as steady's a church an' never parted so much as a ropeyarn. She's a sweet ship an' no mistake. But the Old Man must be all shot to pieces about his gal or he'd never sail the ship like that!"

Mr. Hocker crammed a wad of tobacco into his lean cheek and looked at Cap'n Bob, who was staring out across the waste of waters in the direction of St. Helena.

"Yep! He's in trouble, an' looks like the ship knows it. She's tryin' to help him all she can in her way, d'ye see. Arter all's said an' done, Mr. Knolls, the best friend a sailor has is his ship. Ain't it the truth!"

IN THE next thirty days the *Stormy Petrel* had taken seven hundred and fifty barrels of oil, making in all from the time they had left New Bedford, six months and a half ago, one thousand and fifty-one barrels. A splen-

did record for a new skipper to put in his log-book for a delighted owner's perusal! But though all this served to help Cap'n Bob's troubled spirit to sustain its load, his grim face showed no elation as Mr. Hocker commented on their unusual luck while they finished cleaning ship after stowing down the oil from their last whale. At about eleven o'clock the next morning, Friday, the mastheads reported a sail broad on the starboard quarter and coming down before the wind.

The *Stormy Petrel* was jogging along under all plain sail (her exact position by observation that morning being Lat. 29° 9′ S; Lon. 31° 54′ W) with the wind about a point free and Cap'n Bob held his course until he could make out the other vessel as the whaling bark *Two Sisters* of New Bedford.

Her skipper was undoubtedly bent on having a gam, for he had set all his muslin and was heading so as to intercept the Stormy Petrel. Also, in a few minutes more, he ran the code flag over H. up to his peak, signalling:

Heave to. I have something important to communicate.

Cap'n Bob smiled grimly as he read the signal through his glasses.

"I suppose that old busybody of a Hi Tibbits is still in command of her, Mr. Hocker," he observed. "He probably called into St. Helena before coming down here and got an earful of my doings there. Well, I don't want to hear it and I don't want that rheumy-eyed pest, aboard, nohow. You there, Bill!" to the man at the wheel, "keep her off seven points. Brace in your yards, Mr. Hocker, and we'll put a stretch of blue water between us and that babbler as quickly as possible."

With the wind on her quarter the *Stormy Petrel* was soon showing a clean wake to the slightly slower vessel astern, and Cap'n Bob was congratulating himself on having avoided an awkward meeting when there came a sudden bellow from the main masthead.

"Ar-r-r bl-o-o-ow—bl-o-o-o-w—thar he whitewaters! Sparm whales, sir. A bull an' two cows, looks like!"

"Where away?" yelled Cap'n Bob, his eyes kindling, all else forgotten for the moment.

"Two p'ints on the port bow an' 'bout a mile away, sir!" came the answer.

"Damnation!" ejaculated the skipper in vexation, suddenly mindful of the fact that if he stopped to lower he would be overtaken by the *Two Sisters*. But whaling was the game, and he must play it though the heavens fell. And so with a sort of premonition that this day would disclose some remarkable events Cap'n Bob gave the order to square yards and head for the whales.

After a short time a light squall struck the ship, taking the wind with it as it passed over, and leaving the *Stormy Petrel* lifting to a glassy sea. The *Two Sisters* still held a breeze, but soon ran down into the calm belt where she lay tossing, with slatting sails, about a quarter mile away.

The spirit of the chase, now sperm whales were spouting less than a half mile away, fired Cap'n Bob's blood and he cared not at all if that other skipper knew what had happened in St. Helena. His sole obsession was to get his boats into the water and be the first into that pod of whales.

But though his men worked with a fury of haste the *Two Sisters* was equally quick in lowering. It now developed into a race between the rival boats as to which should get fast first, and in consequence officers and men strained every nerve; the light cedar crafts flying over the water like so many gulls.

With his nostrils expanded to inhale the exhilarating, saline odor emanating from the immense creatures, Cap'n Bob steered his boat between the flukes of the two cow whales, making for the big one hundred barrel bull that was about fifty feet ahead. Out of the clew of his eye the skipper caught a glimpse of a rival boat steered by a clean-shaven giant who was urging his men on in a hissing whisper.

"STAND up, Ike!" Cap'n Bob ordered his boatsteerer in a low, tense tone as the great, shining hump of the monster bull broke water a half boat's length away. Ike peaked his oar in a flash and springing up, snatched an iron from the crotch and fitted his knee into the arch of the clumsy-cleat.

Cap'n Bob gave a sudden swing off on his twenty-two foot steering-oar and "blackskinned" the head of the boat onto the whale at the same time shouting to his boatsteerer to dart. The latter immediately planted two irons, to the service, in the bull just forward of the hump. A second or two later an iron from the rival boat whizzed through the air and also toggled solidly in the whale.

"Stern—stern for your lives!" bellowed Cap'n Bob.

As soon as his boat was clear of those lethal flukes, which were threshing the sea to foam, he turned a face red with wrath upon the officer in the rival boat.

"What d'ye mean, damn' you, fastening to my whale?" he bawled. "I ain't going to halve the chances. Cut line and get the hell out of this. You know——"

He never finished the sentence, for the whale suddenly settled in the water like so much lead and the next instant came up under the keel of the *Two Sisters'* boat, lifting it bodily into the air and spilling out everybody but the boatheader. The latter was stooping for a knife to cut the line when to Cap'n Bob's horror one of the flying coils whisked about the officer's legs and he disappeared like a flash over the bow of the boat as the whale started off on a mad career.

"Pull ahead, men!" roared Cap'n Bob, noticing that the whale had stopped suddenly and was about to mill around. "We'll get that fellow!"

The boat shot ahead a couple of lengths and Cap'n Bob, yelling "Way enough!" grabbed the boat-knife and plunged overboard. A dive of three feet under water and a few powerful strokes brought him to the taut line, which he severed with one stroke of his knife. With the free end of the line in his hand he broke water close to his boat, passed the line to the boatsteerer and, telling his crew to haul in on it, climbed back into the boat.

The men hauled with a will and in a minute or so to their inexpressible amazement up popped an immense pair of sea boots. But they lost no time in speculating what kind of a whaleman it was that wore such unusual foot gear for tropic whaling, for they immediately perceived that the owner's feet were still in them and that he was hanging head down in the water. Whereupon with no little mirth they dragged him into the boat.

The rescued whaleman slumped in a dazed way into the stern sheets, spat out a mouthful of salt water, squilgeed his face with a lumpy forefinger, and then turned a pair of strangely familiar blue eyes on the skipper of the *Stormy Petrel*.

As Cap'n Bob met their amused gaze he started and gave a snort of surprise.

"Well, I'm damned!" he spurted out. "If it ain't Cap'n Ben Russell. I thought I knew those boots!"

Before he could find anything further to say the mate of the *Two Sisters* laid his boat alongside and Cap'n Ben jumped into it.

"I'll be aboard an' gam ye tonight, Cap'n Heldare!" he sung out across the intervening water, for the bull had started to run again and was rapidly towing Cap'n Bob's boat away. "An' be kind enough to wait for me this time. Cussed if I ain't been lookin' for ye all over the South Atlantic!"

LEVIATHAN, mad clear through and looking for fight, gave Cap'n Bob no time to analyze his feelings at being thus abruptly confronted by his St. Helena antagonist. For hardly had he changed ends with the boatsteerer when the bull, snapping his spout-hole in an excess of rage, made a dash for his enemy, his eighteen-foot lower jaw dropped to its fullest extent in readiness to be thrown over the boat.

Quick as winking Cap'n Bob snatched up the loaded brass bombgun and slapped the butt to his shoulder.

"Steady, now, Ike!" he cautioned the boatsteerer, while he eyed the oncoming monster. "When I fire throw the head of the boat to port as far's you can. Stand by now, everybody."

Came a half-minute or so of nerve-racking suspense. Just as it looked as if boat and men would surely be engulfed in that cavern of a maw, the whale rolled partly over at full speed, checked himself and threw his great lower jaw, armed with forty-nine eight-inch ivory tusks, out of water so close to the whalemen that its shadow fell across the boat. This was the moment the skipper had been looking for and with a steady finger he pulled trigger, sending an eighteen-inch bomb slap down the whale's gullet into his vitals.

With the report of the gun the alert boatsteerer gave a mighty heave on his oar and the boat spun clear of the half-breach which Leviathan gave as the exploding bomb tore his throat to fragments. Then the boat's crew gave an exultant cheer, for after this fling of agony the giant bull milled partly round and began spouting thick blood. In another minute he went into a short flurry, rolled partly over, his junk to the sun, his jaw hanging down loosely; one fin stuck out at right angles to his body, and rising and falling with the motion of the waves. Leviathan was fin out—dead.

And all this time a slim, willowy girl with tender blue eyes had been watching the combat through her glasses from the poop of the *Two Sisters*.

WITH his broad face wreathed in smiles Cap'n Ben Russell came over the *Stormy Petrel's* rail just before sundown and shook hands heartily with her skipper.

"Haw, guess ye didn't know me at first sight with my bale o' oakum shaved off!" he boomed. "Them whiskers was fine in the Okhotsk Sea but a leetle too close for this climate." He looked down at his big sea boots and grinned. "I'm so used to them boots, though, I ain't easy in a boat without 'em. Good thing I had 'em on, too, or that cussed line 'ud cut my feet clean off." He slapped Cap'n Bob jovially on the shoulder. "From all accounts you went after me mighty slick when I was foul o' the line. I won't forget it, nuther. But let's go below an' oil the chronometer."

Over a glass of Old Medford Cap'n Ben told how he happened to be in St. Helena at the same time as Cap'n Bob. Anxious to see the man his girl had chosen for a husband, he had accepted a good offer for his vessel and sold her to a firm in Hakodate, Japan. He had come home from there by steamer and rail, arriving in New Bedford two weeks after Cap'n Bob had sailed. Not caring to remain idle, Cap'n Ben had bought out Cap'n Hi Tibbles in the *Two Sisters* and sailed for a cruise in the Gulf of Guinea after arranging for Rose to come out on the *Lottie Beard* to St. Helena, at which port Cap'n Bob was scheduled to call to meet the schooner.

"Haw, y'see, I had it all figgered out for us three to meet at the island, an' there was to be a weddin' before we sailed ag'in. Haw, a reg'lar Dan Cupid I be an' no mistake." He gave a huge guffaw and continued. "Waal, I musta got into port a couple o' hours before ye did, Cap'n Bob, an' seein' the *Lottie Beard* hadn't arrived I went for a little drift, knowin' that when ye [illegible] I'd have to walk the straight an' narrer. But I hadn't got to hardly feelin' good when yer mate starts a-laffin' at my boots. Laffin'? Godfrey mighty! He jes' stood in the middle o' the floor and roared like a [illegible]. That's what started the hull thing, seein' as how I'm mighty techey about the size o' them boots." Cap'n Bob sipped his drink and grinned reminiscently. "But I liked ye right off, Cap'n Bob, the way ye stood up for yer kind; an' soon's I learned who ye was I says to myself, 'Here's my chance to see what sorta stuff Rose's feller is made of.' An' I'm here to say that I sartainly did so."

He laughed and rubbed the deep scar over his shaggy right eyebrow.

"But I took an unfair advantage o' ye, Cap'n Bob, for I knowed win or lose I'd get my watch back, for no dutiful son-in-law 'ud keep it."

"You mean that Rose has forgiven," Cap'n Bob gasped. "That we can get——"

"Exactly! As master o' a ship I'm duly qualified to perform the operation, an' that's what I'm a-goin' to do this very night!" Cap'n Ben beamed on the young skipper.

"Then Rose—Rose is aboard the *Two Sisters?*" Cap'n Bob stammered, leaning weakly against the bulkhead.

"Ye can bet yer last bar'l o' oil she is. Ye see, Cap'n Bob, I wasn't hurt nigh as bad's they thought. I was outa the hospital the next mornin', an' two hours afterward me an' my gal up killick an' started arter ye. But ye musta drove yer ship like all hell for this is the first we've seen o' you. So get inter gear now. On with yer Sunday duds an' we'll go!"

Too overcome for words, Cap'n Bob reached over and wrung his hand.

"An' by-the-by," added Cap'n Ben, grinning down at his great boots, "we'll take that mate o' yourn along. But for him we wouldn't a-knowned each other so well in another ten years as we do right now!"

Another Whaling Yarn Next Time

WHALEMEN'S FORTUNE

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Another stirring tale of adventure and peril in hunting the giants of the sea. It comes to you in the next FRONTIER STORIES

RANDOM SHADOWS *of the* OLD FRONTIER

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Restless Guns," "The Seven Gay Riders," etc.

They have passed along with the years—Hickok, Calamity Jane, all the wild crowd that celebrated in old Deadwood, all the tough breed that led the advance into the beautiful Black Hills—but in the memory of an old-timer they ***live on forever.***

WHEN Wild Bill Hickok, the famous gun-fighter, was assassinated by "Broken-nosed" Jack McCall, in Deadwood, Dakota Territory, August 2, 1876, a young Civil War veteran, Ellis Taylor Peirce, whose knack for dressing gunshot wounds had given him the title of "Doc," volunteered to prepare the body for burial.

Doc found Bill lying on the floor of Jerry Lewis' saloon, with his right arm twisted under him and his legs drawn up. McCall had slipped through a back door and shot Bill in the back of the head.

The miners loaded the dead man into a wagon and dragged it up the gulch to his camp.

Doc washed the blood off the fourteen-inch golden-brown hair and cut off a few locks for mementoes.

Charlie Utter, Bill's partner, appropriated the gunfighter's cap-and-ball six-shooters. The guns formed the bulk of the Hickok estate.

A curious crowd watched Doc's undertaking operations, noting the many bullet scars on the long, white body. There was a fascination about the remains of the man who had placed so many gun-throwers in the position his body was occupying. But there was not much comment. When a man is dead there isn't much left to talk about.

McCall was tried by a miners' jury and acquitted. He declared Bill had killed his brother. Doc said the murderer lied. McCall lost no time in leaving Deadwood. Later the killer was picked up in Laramie, Wyoming, by a U. S. deputy marshal, taken to Yankton, Dakota Territory, and there hanged by the neck until extremely dead. Doc said there were neither flowers nor regrets, and that the only feature of the job that displeased him was that it had been so long neglected.

WHEN what is now North and South Dakota was Dakota Territory, the governor had the right to appoint county officers, but the Black Hillers of the roaring Seventies were like the Americans of 1776; they resented long-distance government by some political jacksnipes. In 1877, the men of Custer, exercising their Anglo-Saxon rights, organized a county and elected officers. The town of Custer was then a cluster of cabins in a beautiful park in the southern Black Hills.

Doc was elected sheriff. His "office" was a mud-chinked log cabin. He was thirty-one years of age. A heavy-set, full-faced man, with a droopy mustache, a straight, well-formed nose, hair inclined to waviness, grayish eyes, and a high forehead.

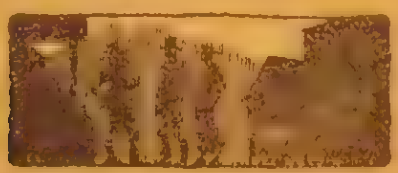
The governor sent in some sneaking carpet-baggers who managed to steal the records of the new county and move them to Hayward, a log cabin camp in Pennington County where they had a townsite grabbed.

Pennington already had a county seat. Doc couldn't see why it needed two. He told me that he thought it wasn't right for Pennington to go round collecting county seats that way.

So he put on his buckskins, oiled up his six-shooter and started out to recover his county seat. He had a posse with him, but one of his followers, feeling that there might be "a leetle shootin'," acquired a bad case of "cold feet," and took his chilled "dogs" into the brush to nurse some warmth into them.

But there was no shooting. The carpet-baggers lay down and turned up all fours. Doc put his county seat in a cigar box and took it back to Custer, but later the carpet-baggers proved too strong for him.

First thing he knew he was in jail in Pennington County. A friend, Fred Evans, the freighter, put up his bond money and he was released. But Destiny was waiting around the corner to give Doc his revenge. He was later elected sheriff of Pennington County and presided over the jail in which he had once been confined.



A GRUMBLE, in one of his letters to me, about the inaccuracies in accounts of early days in Deadwood:

> I see they now have Calamity Jane the sweetheart of Wild Bill. Actually I never saw them speak to each other. Next thing, I suppose, they'll have Jane married to Sitting Bull.

Doc knew Jane in her palmy days. He never had much to say about her alleged scouting and Indian fighting. When I'd ask him about her scouting and Indian fighting, he'd sidestep with some outrageous yarn like the following:

> I was bedded down in my camp in some jack pines above Deadwood, dreaming I was being tortured by Injuns. All of a sudden I woke to find Calamity Jane had part of my blankets. She had spurs on, and being restless, had been roweling me.
>
> I sat up and she sat up with me. She came with a full hand—two sixes.
>
> "Don't git sentimental," she snaps, her thumbs on the hammers, "or I'll fill you so full of lead they'll have to assay you to tell who you be and where to send you!"
>
> Boy, there's no romance in a woman with a high temper, who sleeps with her spurs on. I let her have the blankets. Scat!

I talked with Calamity Jane in Deadwood when she was old and broken and ready to die. She was worrying childishly about an old hat she had left in Mac the Saddler's place. I could get nothing out of her about the old days. I gave her a piece of money and let it go at that. She died a few weeks later, and the Black Hills pioneers buried her near Wild Bill.

Doc sent me a photograph of Jane in her prime.

A sturdy, full-faced young woman, with a strong, straight nose, small deep-set eyes, a generous mouth with drooping corners, and dark hair. There is little feminine softness in her face. Her jaw and chin show a masculine heaviness.

I'm not inclined to believe the stories about Jane's scouting and Indian fighting. I always regarded her as a rough-neck hen who was trying to develop spurs and a crow.

Here, in part, is what Doc wrote on the back of Jane's picture:

> Jane Canary. Born in old Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Mother, a laundress; father, U. S. teamster. She died in the Black Hills, April, 1904. Good-hearted, but a very hard formation.

A LITTLE yarn from one of Doc's letters to me:

> When I came to the Black Hills, in the first days of 1876, there were still some of those French Canadian trappers on the different streams. They called themselves Hudson Bay men, but they were all from Montreal originally.
>
> One of those old ducks told me about finding another trapper years before over on the Belle Fourche River. He and his partner had just arrived and were looking for a good place on the lower Belle for winter headquarters. They found a place that suited them, and went up-stream with some beaver traps.

It had been deadly cold; the river was frozen over solid. They noticed what at first looked like the butt of a log on the bank. They went up to it to drag it down for firewood; but, when they got to it, they discovered it was a man, lying on his stomach, partly on the bank, and with both hands frozen in the ice.

They chopped him loose. In dragging him out they found that both his hands had been caught in a beaver trap.

In setting traps for beaver, after a freeze-up, Bob, they cut two holes in the ice; that not only lets in the air to bring the beaver but it helps in placing the trap just right to catch the beaver when he comes to the hole for air.

The trapper said the poor fellow must have set his trap, and then, while feeling around the pan to see that there was nothing under it to prevent it springing, he accidentally sprung it and was caught by both hands and held there for keeps.

They had no way to bury him while the ground was frozen, so they dragged the body down to their camp and kept it a few days, thinking the dead man might have a partner in that vicinity.

But no partner came looking for him. They laid him on the ground and piled large stones over him until spring came; and to keep the wolves occupied they scattered poisoned bait around the grave.

On the body was one of those little tricks Catholics wear around their necks, emblems of their religion. His passbook showed his name to be, Antonie DeTeinne, Montreal, Canada.

The cold and snow kept the body in good condition until the spring thaw, when they gave it decent burial and placed a marker over it.

SOME comments and recollections prompted by reading an army yarn of mine:

Pa-ha-sap-pa (full moon)

My dear Bob:

I have read your story. It is a good one; but, Bob, how many can grab it, except those who have seen service, or one who has been under a dummy officer?

A man never knows what he will do under fire. I have seen damn fools go in laughing, and others crying; and all stick.

We had a first lieutenant who would jump into a fist fight, but whenever we went under fire the big chawbacon would * * * * * *

I had to delete here. This is a different world from the old plain-spoken frontier. And Doc sometimes forgets that sad fact. He continues:

It was a lot harder for me to stand waiting to get into action than action itself, for the excitement steadied my nerves after the old gun got warmed up.

Bob, I was just thinking I would leave you my old pearl-handled six-gun. She's a Smith and Wesson, .38 cal. If you hold her right, she's sure to commit some depredation.

I don't remember how you hold a gun, Bob, but I learned something from my former captain in the Civil War, who was made a major on the field after Major Johnston was killed in the Centralia Massacre, September, 1864. My old captain always threw his gun over his left arm and grabbed his right shoulder with his left hand, which gave him a perfect brace. Draw your gun back, but not so the end will drop down and nip your arm like mine once did when my horse jumped.

I thought last evening that squaw winter was coming, but the thunder did not bring any rain and we're in the clear today. Gee! how I would like to go out in the open again and have a taste of sage and ashes once more, but I'm hamstrung by age and have to play old Red Cloud and stick to the tepee.

I'll send the old six by express, as I hear they won't let us send guns by parcel post. Strange, isn't it? Might make some of those sleepers in the post-office wake up to have a gun go off occasionally under their bills.

The old Hills are more beautiful this fall than I have ever seen them. The grass stayed green all summer on account of the changing climate and so much rain. Frost has painted the vines and trees.

I'm getting pretty wabbly, and my trailer doesn't seem to track any more. I'm like an old wagon wheel after the boxing is worn out; but, from the chest up, I'm all right. Well, I would much

rather it would be that way than to commence at the top like an old oak. So many of these old soldier boys die at the top, and go around drooling like a baby or like a horse after eating green apples.

Well, Bob, my tank is about dry, and I think it a good time to hang up.

Adios, and good luck to you, boy.

Doc.

IN THE following, Doc packs the history of a frontier town into a handful of type:

Bob, they moved the bodies in the old cemetery at Sidney, Nebraska, the other day. I'll give you a partial list of what they found.

Army officers buried in steel caskets, with glass windows. They were so well preserved—they'd been embalmed—that their red faces shining through the glass gave even the undertakers a start.

Some of the skeletons had their boots on, and several had baling wire around their ankles, wrists and necks, making it easy to guess how they had died.

One woman had a baby in her arms, and her skull riddled with bullets—most likely ambushed by Indians.

A big regular soldier had on his blue army overcoat, the same being well preserved.

One person had evidently been buried alive, for the skeleton was on its face.

An old man and his son who were murdered fifty years ago were recognized by the marks of the ax on their skulls. The man who killed them was there, too; and while they were digging him up the sheriff who had executed him died. Going and coming, Bob, going and coming.

Many men were found with their hats covering their faces, the sign of violent death and hasty burial.

A GLIMPSE of a raw night in old Cheyenne:

I was thinking last night, Bob, of McDaniels' joint in Cheyenne, a gambling house and tough theater under one roof.

In bull train days McDaniels got most of the bullwhacker's money, and his girls got the rest.

One evening Clay's outfit got through loading late, so Cal Ayers (brother to George of Deadwood) told the bullwhackers they could spend the night in Cheyenne.

Dirty Jake and Mexican Joe were pards. They hurried down to McDaniels', got a table near the stage and called for beer. The show was one that ran on forever. Jake, with his tonsils floating on beer, finally laid his tired head on the table and dreamed, I suppose, of chuck holes on the Black Hills trail.

They were playing what the bullwhackers called "meller-drammer." Suddenly an old battle-ax came rushing down to the footlights, showing the two teeth she had left, and screeching like a mountain lion, "My reputation is ruined, ruined, ruined!"

Her squawking awoke Dirty Jake. He raised his head up slowly, like a land turtle, looked her up and down, and then bawled:

"Serves you right! You shouldn't 'a' gone in the ark with Noah."

DOC was always writing me about old-timers. Some extracts:

I invested twenty-five bucks in a history of South Dakota, in five volumes, by my old friend, George W. Kingsbury, of Yankton, S. D., who started a newspaper in Dakota Territory in the early sixties.

I sent for a book by Captain Gilette, who spent six years as a Texas Ranger. Talk about dare-devil work! I presented the book to old Jesse Brown, Sturgis, S. D., who was a shotgun guard on the gold-dust coach running out of the Black Hills in the early days. He'll lap up the Texan's book like a kitten licking sweet cream.

Jesse and Cap Willard have written a book on stagecoach days. Cap died very suddenly, so Jesse got a man to edit the manuscript. I wrote a few pieces for the book, and Dick Hughes threw in some, as Jesse and Cap had asked us to help out a little.

Old Uriah Gilette, of Slate Creek, is here in the soldiers' hospital. . . .

Let me cut in here, Doc.

I was placering on Slate Creek before my sixteenth birthday, and knew old Uriah and a lot more like him.

I remember Slate Creek mighty well because, one morning, nearly out of grub, and with my boots stiff from working in the water, I put a frying pan full of grease on the fire and ran down to the creek barefooted to get coffee water.

Returning, I saw the grease was blazing. It was precious stuff and I grabbed the handle of the frying pan. It was hot and turned in my hand. The panful of flaming grease struck my bare foot.

The agony was intolerable. I ran down to the stream and plunged my foot into the ice-cold water. That solidified the grease. When I removed the grease, a good deal of the flesh came off with it.

I lay in a lean-to three days and nights. On the fourth day I wrapped my burned foot in flour sacks, and walked forty miles. Yes, I remember Slate Creek.

Doc rambles on about his old Slate Creek pard:

Old Uriah is about ready to cash in. I put my old carcass into a car and went up to see him. I asked him if he remembered the man who, with Clark E. Stocking and himself, pursued the road agents, after the Cold Springs robbery. It was some time before he recognized me and remembered our ride after the bandits, who, by the way, failed to get away with the gold.

At last his memory got out of the gumbo. He grabbed my hand with both of his and cried like a child.

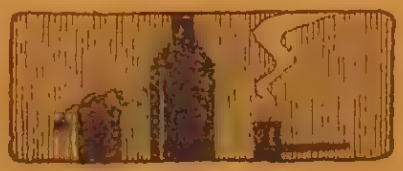
"Doc," he said, "you don't know how glad I am that you come up to see me!"

Poor old boy! Teeth gone, eyes glazed, dying at the top like an old oak!

One veteran of the Mexican War died here recently. He was in the 2nd Dragoons. He was a giant in size and was close to the century mark when he let go. He'd been a U. S. scout and had lived in the open so much that he was as tough as shagbark hickory. They've stopped raising his kind. All they want now is something that knows enough to read a sign and is just strong enough to press a button.

Just got a letter from Dick Hughes, the old-time Black Hills journalist, one of the finest characters I have ever known, and whom you, I know, will recall with pleasure. Poor Dick is all drawn out of shape with rheumatism of the joints, and has to be handled like a baby. But he's game—game as they make 'em. He ties a pencil to a long stick and uses his shoulder in writing—the swinging motion. A hard job for poor Dick! Bob, when we start to grunt about our own ailments, we should remember there is always some man suffering far more, and that, too, without squealing.

Jim Brennan, Charlie Ham, and John Spayde called on me the other day. How old we all have grown! Yet it seems like yesterday when we were young, full of hope, looking toward the rising instead of the setting sun. I looked around at the old crowd. White-haired and headed for the boneyard, wrinkled up like Egyptian mummies with the wrappers off. I knew I was in the same fix. I don't want to look in a mirror again, Bob.



HIS seventy-nine years are crowding Doc to the wall. He writes:

Bob, they've shut off my licker and tobacco. They claim the stomach can't handle the redeye, and that the tobacco makes the old heart get out of step. What, then, is there left? Nothing except to look at the scenery and bother my friends with my letters. Couldn't sleep tonight, so thought I'd write a letter to Bob. Don't mind me, boy, or let me interfere with your work. You get paid for what you write, and I don't, so

don't bother about answering until you've nothing else to do.

BEFORE we lope on again with Doc, let me unwind a few paragraphs about the Black Hills.

The early paradise of the Sioux, his last hunting ground, for wild romantic beauty there was, in my day, no country in the world to equal the Black Hills of South Dakota. As a boy, wandering with an Indian pony, I dreamed along their singing streams, loafed in their tiger-lily-spangled parks, built my campfires in their deep canyons and in the depths of their pine forests.

I loved and still love those mystic mountains and have tried to tell of their charm and beauty in song and story. But, when I knew them, there were no forest officers, no cement highways, no signs to tell about such and so breakfast food, no coughing consumptive jitneys, none of this mess called civilization. There were mountain ranches, with lazy cows straying through the timber. There were spring houses with the milk crocks standing in cold pure water. There were wild raspberries to throw in a dish and drench with pure rich cream. There were deer jumping up in droves. Here and there one would find an old prospector sitting in a shady nook, smoking placidly and working a rocker. There were carefree men shoveling gravel into roaring sluices in canyons where always was the smell of fresh water and the tang of pine. There were dusty roads and trails winding through the canyons, across the lovely parks and into the deep woods. The Great Spirit created a masterpiece when he made the Black Hills.

Doc is thinking of the old free days when a man only needed his rifle, a bag of salt and some tobacco to be independent and happy. He takes his pen in hand and throws this loose:

> My mouth has been watering lately for a taste of wild meat. Roast buffalo hump would go good, or some venison steaks fried with bacon. Maybe some of my friends will knock over a deer when the season opens and remember old Doc. I've plenty of valler-legged chickens, but once in a while I get a hankering for wild meat. I would sure like to break out in the open again and broil a piece of venison or flip a flapjack or two.

I NEVER could get Doc to take dinner with me at the Evans, then the biggest and most pretentious hotel in Hot Springs, South Dakota. He had some sort of prejudice against the Evans dining-room. I imagined that it was because some gourdhead, newly arrived in the Black Hills, had attempted to impress the old-timers with a dinner jacket bought second-hand in Sioux City or Omaha.

However, Doc would sit with me on the big porch during the pleasant summer evenings and watch the hotel guests dance.

The leader of the orchestra was a hair-tossing jumping jack. For some time Doc regarded him sadly, as if wondering why he was permitted to live.

Then he turned to me, and, after some smoky comment on the violinist, told me a little story of a night in the roaring camp of Deadwood, in the red, red long ago.

There was something in the yarn that touched my then youthful fancy—something that lingered. I put it into verse, and here it is:

DOC PEIRCE'S CHOICE

THE Injuns claim a bear is wise
As anything beneath the skies;
And thinkin' Doc Peirce 'bout the same,
They handed him his Bear Tracks name.

A big hotel, with Doc and me
On the pahzazza; and there be
A fancy fiddler playin' of
Some hifalootin' dream of love.

Says Doc, "That feller prob'ly thinks
That he's a lulu, when, by jinks,
With all that flip and flop and twist,
He's jes' a dude contortionist!
That sound he makes don't touch no part
Of the old, common human heart.

"A Deadwood night," Doc smiles, "that takes
Its sinnin' straight till morning breaks;
That roars on through without no stops
Except fer him the quick gun drops.
Ah, rough and tough that long, slim town

That strings her light the canyon down!
A healthy cussedness, I'll say,
Not like the muck we see today.

"I'd not been long in that wild camp,
Before old Nature's crushin' stamp
Falls on my heart; and I, well, I
Am that homesick I want to die.
I see a place and in I bust,
To watch the games and see the dust
A-changin' hands; and likewise see
If any soul on earth knows me.

"No chalk it down; produce your dust;
The barkeeps never heard of trust.
No jawbone goes; throw down the gold,
And play the game and play her bold!
Don't try no bluff; put up the stuff,
Or you'll be leaded quick enough.
"And then a sad-faced kid walks in—
Young drifter with a violin.
It is his game to play a while,
And then collect in preacher style.

"Now talk o' makin' dumb things speak!
You oughta see that there boy's cheek
Lay lovin'like on that noise box,
While on his heels he stands and rocks,
And lets his soul drift down them strings
And tell you all life's sweetest things!
He stopped—the world got dark and cold,
Like when you know you're gettin' old.
And then I says to him right then,
'Say, son, I antes up a ten,
If you'll jes' give my heart a treat—
Play "Sunny Southern Skies" complete.'

"The poor kid nods, then snugs his chin
Up close to that old violin.
And draws the bow— Oh, boy, oh, boy!
She right then starts to cry with joy;
But underneath the happiness
Run little homesick moans, I guess.
God knows I swallowed—yes, more, too;
Grass isn't all that carries dew!
And then through misty eyes I sees
One tough old sport pretend to sneeze,
A-lettin' on he had a cold.
'Uh huh!' sniffs I. 'That game is old.'

"And then I pulls my hat lid down,
And goes my way through Deadwood town,
With that old tune a-ha'ntin' me—
Dead lonesome—lonesome as can be!

"'Neath 'Sunny Southern Skies,' you bet
Sure made some long-dry eyes spring wet!
That's why this high-flung music goes
Right past my ears and never throws
One throb beneath my vest. B'gee,
That pawer digs no sympathy,
Because hard luck ain't crushed the loon,
And put some heartache in his tune.

"That's why my choice I'll always throw
Strong on that piece played years ago,
By that poor, lonely, driftin' kid,
His past a blank, his future hid;
Just him and his old fiddle brown,
With luck a-playin' up and down.
He had his scars, 'twas plain to see;
That's why there in his music be
The feelin' strong, the human pull,
That made throats hurt and eyes get full.
Upon us all his spell he laid,
Because he'd suffered what he'd played."

SOME time ago Doc sent me his picture, with this written on the back:

Bear Tracks' last stand on the Sunset Trail. Ellis T. Peirce, born near Philadelphia, Penn., April 24, 1846; died in the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1925.

This photo is for Lone Elk, an honored member of the Ogallala band of white Sioux, a society that has no fees or dues, and only one sign: when hungry, point at the face and grab a chunk of boiled dog.

Bear Tracks, Chief.

I have not heard from Doc for many months. The ominous silence tells me that I shall never hear from him again. I dread to write—dread to know for a certainty that he is gone. Perhaps, on the back of his picture, he called the turn on his passing. If so, the sign of farewell. May the old-timer find good camps, green grass and running water. His pards will miss him, and none more than Bob.

ED. NOTE—Ellis Taylor Peirce died at the Battle Mountain National Sanitarium, Hot Springs, South Dakota, on August 13, 1926. Many old-timer friends rallied at his funeral. Speaking of the simple services, the Hot Springs *Star and Times Herald* remarked, "There was about the whole service an air of tender yet not gloomy farewell that touched the note of Doc's personality and life; it was as though he had gone on to camp for a night or two beyond, and would be there in the dawn, waiting."

THE CROSS AND DOUBLE CROSS

By MARTIN STEVERS

Steamboating the Missouri in the old days was sufficiently adventurous without carrying a cargo that would prove a magnet to every crook on the river.

A SUDDEN babble of laughs and talk broke out on the cargo deck of the river packet *Eagle,* as she rocked gently at her moorings beside the St. Louis levee in April of the year 1840. A moment later the roustabouts, dismissed for the day, streamed across the gangplank and up the broad levee toward the city. The last of the *Eagle's* cargo had been stowed, and she was ready to start her first trip of the season up the Missouri to the Dakotas.

At the sound, two men who had been pacing the texas or topmost deck of the little packet stepped to the rail on the city side. One was a red-haired, barrel-chested man with arms that extended gorilla-like almost to his knees—Captain Andy Corbin, master of the vessel. The other in many ways was an antithesis to the fiery captain. He was a pink-cheeked, pudgy man, with round blue eyes that by their constant stare of astonishment, showed his lack of adjustment to the asperities of frontier life. He was David Harker, chief clerk of the English banking firm which was backing Corbin as master of the *Eagle*. Likewise Harker was purser for the voyage.

It was he who broke the silence.

"I say," he commenced, in the clipped accents he had brought from London. "Everything's ready now, except setting sail—and our bookings won't let us do that till morning. So why not get ourselves a bit of dinner at the best tavern in town? Last chance for some months, you know."

Captain Andy chuckled, and his blue eyes twinkled. But behind the twinkle, an alert observer could have caught a touch of grimness. The tone of his voice strengthened the impression.

"That would be the ticket," he said, "if this was an ordinary voyage. But you're forgetting it ain't ordinary, this time. Not by a darn' sight, it ain't. You ain't forgot, have you, that this crook Blake has been here all winter, cooking up a deal with the big banking crowd? And you ain't forgot that he's burnin' to pay me back for blocking that Platte River steal of his last summer, or the pleasant ways he has of paying off old scores?"

Despite the springtime warmth, Harker shivered. Ever since reaching St. Louis, he had heard tales of Blake and his operations on the upper Missouri—activities that made even the toughest frontiersman shake his head. And he had heard hints of what Blake meant to do to Captain Andy, as soon as the *Eagle* got into wild country in

the spring. Now the *Eagle* was starting, and that meant trouble at any moment.

"I see you get me," Captain Andy went on in his deep, rumbling tones. "So for this little dinner—you can go if you want to, but I'm not setting foot off this packet until she's well up the river. And if you're wise, you'll not——"

He broke off suddenly to scan the shore line. Harker, following the direction of his gaze, saw that a man had debouched from one of the streets and was casting about along the upper edge of the levee, evidently seeking some one of the many boats. Suddenly alert, Harker watched the stranger until Andy touched his arm and nodded toward the newcomer.

"Less'n I'm wrong," the captain said, "that fellow is one of Blake's men. Works for a bank that Blake's got in with this winter, I mean. And I'll bet dollars to doughnuts he's looking for us. Want to lay a little bet?"

Harker, all thought of dinner gone, shook his head. It had all seemed unreal to him before, this talk of frontier feuds and peaceful traders assailed by murder. But now this unreal thing had come to them, was casting about, in the person of this clerk, to commence the battle.

Suddenly the stranger, catching sight of them in the gloaming, waved his hand and headed for them. Arrived at the levee's edge, he stood peering up at them as they scanned him from the texas deck.

"How are ye, Captain?" he called. "'Bout ready to pull out?"

His tone and inquiry were friendly, Harker thought, for an emissary of the enemy. But Andy was noncommittal.

"'Bout ready as we're goin' to be, I reckon," he called back, leaning both elbows on the rail. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Maybe," the other answered. "Our bank's got something we'd like to go up the river, and seein's how you're pulling out first, we'd like to have you take it."

"Might be all right," Andy replied, "providin' 'tain't too large. Ain't got much room left."

"'Twon't take room," the clerk called back. "Not much more'n a carpetbag full. How soon can we bring it on?"

That news heightened Harker's alarm. A small shipment meant something special—and anything special meant some scheme of Blake's, or so instinct whispered. Harker was glad the captain took time out before answering, though he wondered whether the answer, when it came, was wise.

"Sooner the better, I guess," was the reply. "Can you have it down right away—or got it with you?"

"No," the other responded, turning to leave. "It's at the office. But they'll have it down in half an hour—soon's I can get back and tell them. Much obliged to ye, Captain, for helping us out."

"MUCH obliged for nothing," Andy growled as he turned from the rail. For a moment his rough-hewn, ruddy face showed worry. Then, to Harker's surprise, a smile flickered over his lips, and was followed by a laugh.

"You look as if the British guinea'd turned to pewter," he said. "What's the matter—worryin' 'cause it looks like we're in for a little scrap?"

"Not a bit of it," Harker protested, though his face belied his words. But I'm wondering—don't you think it a bit risky, you know, to take their bloody shipment? Couldn't we save trouble by saying no?"

Captain Andy's brows knit suddenly, and an ominous spark flashed into his eyes as he stared at Harker.

"No, we couldn't," he snapped. "Couldn't let Blake think we're afraid of him, for one thing, or let the bank be telling around that we were afraid to take a shipment. And if we blocked this dodge, Blake'd try another; so we might as well lick him at this one."

The grimness of his expression deepened, as though at some sudden memory. Then he shrugged, and his touch of temper vanished.

"Come on," he said, "and see what the cook can do for us. Long as the trouble's started, we might as well meet it as moan about it, and you'll feel better for having a good meal under the belt when they come aboard."

Obediently Harker followed the captain below, and stood by while the steward made things ready. Aside from a few comments the meal was eaten in silence, and in less than fifteen minutes they were back on the texas deck.

It was completely dark by now—the velvety dark of a warm spring night, save where lamps in uncurtained windows shone like large yellow stars against the black

background of the town and surrounding hills. Soft lapping of water against the packet's side and distant bursts of laughter from groggeries along the water's edge punctuated, rather than relieved, the silence. It was a night for happiness and joy of living; but all Harker could feel in it was the soft touch of intrigue and trouble. More than once he thanked his stars for the presence of the formidable captain, dimly discernible as he leaned watchfully against the rail.

The suspense, however, was not prolonged. Within ten minutes Captain Andy stirred suddenly, paused an instant to listen, then turned about. Suppressed excitement rang in his tones.

"They've showed up," he said. "Come on along and see what's what."

Harker, his knees wobbling a bit now that the test had come, followed him down the forward stairway to the cabin deck, then down to the top of the hill, which was the cargo deck. Together they crossed the long gangplank to the levee, as footsteps sounded above. A moment later figures loomed through the darkness—several of them.

The color of their garments made them visible sooner than men wearing the customary black of that day would have been. They were clad in the blue-gray worn by the regular army at the time; and they were bearing muskets with bayonets that gleamed dully in the night light.

"Sodgers," Captain Andy muttered to Harker. "Wonder why they're mixin' in. Makes it complicated."

As the group drew near, in its midst Harker made out a muffled figure—the bank's representative, he surmised. A suspicious bulge beneath the visitor's cloak strengthened the supposition. That would be the shipment—something small and light, as the clerk had said it would be.

At the foot of the gangplank the cortege stopped, and the muffled man spoke.

"Captain Corbin?" he inquired. "I'm here to come aboard——"

"Come right along," Captain Andy answered. "I haven't lit any lanterns, but we have some inside. Go light up, will you, Harker?"

At the word Harker departed for the cabin above, and the visitor set foot upon the gangplank. An explosive sigh suggestive of relief escaped him.

"You can hold your men there, Sergeant Tompkins," he said, "until I return. Just watch that nobody comes aboard."

"Yes, sir," came the answer from behind, in the tones of a well-drilled noncom. The sound of musket butts rapping on the levee, as Tompkins ordered, "Ground arms," put a period to the answer. The visitor turned to Captain Andy.

"All right, Captain," he said. "Sorry to be so late—but I'll tell you what it's all about when we're aboard. Could we go to your office?"

"Sure," Andy said, and led the way to the forward cabin on the deck above.

The cabin was a long room, entered from the open space across the forward end of the deck, and flanked on either side by cubby-hole staterooms. Harker had not troubled to light its lamps except at the after end, where the bar stretched its length across almost the entire room. Behind the bar a small opening had been cut in the wall to give communication with a room beyond. On the shelf in this opening was a small whale-oil lamp, glaring at them like a smoky yellow eye staring through the shadows. Harker was nowhere to be seen.

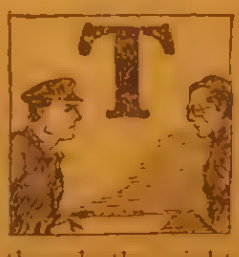
In the dim light Captain Andy could see his visitor shudder a trifle.

"Huh!" he snorted, glancing swiftly about the cabin. "Your man has a saving disposition, Captain, with the lights. Where is he, anyway?"

"In his office there behind the bar," Andy answered, nodding toward the opening with the lamp. "It's the only office we have, so we'll go there. Come on through."

From the opening a narrow corridor ran farther back toward the women's cabin, its after end lost in sooty darkness. A door about six feet ahead, on the landward side, emitted a block of yellow light to illumine the way.

As they reached the door Harker came from inside the room, lifted the bar which blocked entrance, and ushered them in. They took chairs and for a moment eyed each other without a word.



THE visitor was not of the usual frontier type. He was a lean, hatchet-faced man with a hawklike nose and cold, sharp eyes, somewhat obscured by square-framed glasses. Although the night was warm, he kept his cloak clasped about his throat, and its dark folds added to his ominous appearance.

"Well," he said, when the silence was becoming noticeable, "my name's Townley, and I'm cashier of the Missouri and Kan-

sas Traders', on some business we have with H. L. Blake, if you know him. I suppose you're surprised at seeing me here."

"We are," Andy answered. "It's no secret in these parts, Mr. Townley, that you wouldn't be here in usual course of business, when Blake had anything to do with it. So it's plain something queer is in the air, and we're wondering what it is."

Townley shot him a sharp glance, then blinked behind his glasses.

"I've heard you were a blunt man," he said, "and I can see why. But you're right. There is something—something we've never had to handle before—and we need a good man to help. That's why we come to you. Now I'll tell you all about it."

From beneath his cloak he drew a large tin dispatch box, and set it on the table. Both Harker and Captain Andy watched him narrowly, waiting to hear what he had to propose.

"The whole thing is," he said, keeping his hand on the dispatch box, "we've gone into a railroad deal with Blake up in Iowa. We're ready to go ahead now, and our man on the ground needs money—plenty of it. So we've got to send it to him.

"But we haven't been able to keep a deal like this quiet, and a lot of people up Iowa way know the money's coming. I don't need to tell you what that means, you knowing the river as you do. It means every gang in three states will be sniffing around to get a crack at the money, and a good man'll be needed to get the money through. And you're the man, the way we look at it, to do the job, if you'll take it."

Captain Andy's jaw set, and he stared thoughtfully at Townley in the lamplight.

"Sure we'll take it," he said, "and if any gang gets the money, it'll be better than any gang's been yet. How much is it?"

Townley let a thin smile slip over his face—the first evidence he had shown of human feelings—and drew the box nearer to himself. "Get ready for a surprise," he said. "I don't know about you," he went on, with a glance at Harker, "seeing's how you've come from a British bank. But Captain Corbin here is going to see something he's never seen before—something that's hardly been seen west of Washington, if you ask my guess."

He threw open the lid of the box, and waved his hand over its contents.

"Have a look," he said, "at half a million dollars in real money."

II

HALF a million! Silence fell in the stuffy little cabin—silence as thick as the darkness that lay on the night-shrouded river—while they stared at the crisp yellow bills, twinkling up at them in the lamplight. They could hear each other breathing, hear the ticking of Captain Andy's watch, and the lazy lapping of water against the *Eagle's* sides. Half a million! No wonder the gangs would be gathering, Harker thought. And no wonder a good man would be needed to get the money through!

Captain Andy broke the spell.

"Well," he said, "it's a sight of money, but we'll handle it. So we might as well count it in. Are you ready?"

Townley smiled again and took up a slip of paper that lay on top of the money.

"All set," he said. "Here's a tally"—handing the slip to Harker—"and you can check off the amounts as I hand the money to Captain Corbin. I see you have a strongbox that will do. And here's ten thousand in treasury hundreds to start."

The counting proceeded monotonously, with Captain Andy inspecting each packet carefully, both as to amount and character of bill—a necessary precaution at the time, when private bank notes of various degrees of worthlessness still filled the country. As he placed the packets in the strong box, Harker checked off the sum, until all had been counted over. Then Townley handed Captain Andy a duplicate of the tally, to sign a receipt.

As he dipped pen in ink, Andy glanced sternly at the cashier.

"I'm taking this," he said, "like ordinary cargo—due care and diligence, but no indemnity or warranty of special care. If you don't like that, you can take the money back."

Townley waved his hand in an expansive gesture.

"Your due care and diligence, Captain, are enough for us. As for indemnity, we have insurance."

He took the receipt, placed it carefully in his wallet, and rose.

"Just one thing more, Captain. You're going through wild country, and you're going to have a hard time getting through when it's known you have this much money with you. So we arranged with the commander of the St. Louis garrison to send a

detachment of soldiers along, if you want them. They're the men below, and they'll report to you if you want them."

"Sure thing," said the captain. "We'd pull through without them, but I'm not one to turn down help. Send them up."

"All right," Townley said, and drew some papers from an inside pocket.

"Here's a letter to you from the commanding officer, and a copy of the orders he gave them, so you'll know how you stand with them. And that, I guess, is all."

He closed his dispatch box, replaced it beneath his cloak, and held out his hand.

"Good-by, Captain," he said. "And good luck with the job."

Captain Andy shook hands gingerly, and Townley left. Andy listened until the visitor was safely out of the forward cabin, then slapped his hand down heavily on the strong box.

"Well," he demanded, "what do you make of it?"

Harker looked helplessly from Andy to the money and back again.

"I can't make head or tail of it!" he confessed. "They're up to no good, I suppose. Yet this chap Townley was fair-spoken enough, and this military escort looks like honest help. Perhaps they really want us to take this money to Iowa——"

"Huh!" Andy snorted, and there was a somber glow in his eyes as he stared from beneath lowered brows at Harker. "The bank's square, like enough; but that don't count when this skate Blake's mixed up in the deal. It's just his way to line up something respectable, then hit at you from the middle of it. He's using the half million he's talked out of this bank to bait a trap of some kind, and don't you think nothing else. And with that amount of money aboard the trip'll be a record breaker, or I don't know the Missouri.

"So let's get these soldiers aboard and grab some sleep while we have the chance. We'll be needing clear heads, if ever they were needed, commencing at daylight tomorrow morning!"

T NINE o'clock next morning the roustabouts carried the last bales of belated merchandise aboard and deposited them upon the broad, open cargo deck. A few passengers who had lingered in the warm sunshine pouring upon the levee hastened aboard. Captain Andy turned from the port rail of the texas deck and addressed the first mate—formally, since this was an occasion of ceremony.

"Guess you can cast off now, Mr. Smith. Seems as how we're ready."

Smith stalked forward to execute the order, and Andy replaced his elbows on the rail. It was his invariable custom on leaving a landing to wait in that spot on the landward side, watching everyone and everything that came aboard, and he was doubly careful now.

A stentorian bellow sounded forward—Mr. Smith getting the crew into action. Mooring lines were cast off, and the gangplank started to swing in. In another moment the *Eagle* would have been under way; but a shout rang from the upper levee edge and some belated passengers appeared—three of them, two men and a woman.

Captain Andy roared an order; the second mate in the pilot house rang the engines to stop; and Smith on the cargo deck let the gangplank stay outboard. The passengers scrambled aboard; and the packet made a second start. The huge red paddle-wheels creaked, then began to slap the mud-stained waters in steady rhythm. Obediently the *Eagle* slipped from the levee into midstream, first boat of the 1840 season to leave St. Louis for Independence, Fairport, and the upper Missouri.

Captain Andy turned from the rail, puzzlement over the belated passengers in his eyes. He had recognized all three. One, from long and unpleasant contact in St. Louis and on the river, he knew to be Pittsburgh Jake, a black-hatted, frock-coated bully and cheap gambler who rated among the worst of the many that infested the river waters. The others, he had learned when they engaged passage, were a farm couple, bent and worn from long years on the Ohio soil, going to what they hoped would be kindlier life in Kansas. A more ill-assorted company could hardly be imagined.

But that wasn't the root of Andy's wonderment. When they had appeared, Jake had been sharing the baggage-carrying with the man, and helping the woman along; and he had continued to do so until they were aboard. It was the decent thing to do, of course, and the thing most men would have done. But it was the first time Andy ever had known, or heard, of Jake doing the decent thing. Clearly the leopard was changing his spots, unless——

"There's something back of it," he told himself. "Never knew Jake to act like that before. Looks like I'd better be keeping my eyes on all three of them. It's sure getting to be a complicated trip."

A sudden burst of hot words on the deck below testified to yet another of the complications. As though the money, and now the question of Jake and his associates, were not enough, the shout evidenced trouble on another score. Although in politics the twenty-year-old Missouri Compromise had quieted the slavery question, the Missouri River country had not shared the peace. The "popular sovereignty" doctrine, which later was to drench Kansas with blood, had not yet been invented; but even so, the free-soilers and slavery men traveling the river were increasingly bitter toward each other. A little whisky, a taunt or two, and there was sure to be a fight. And Captain Andy, from the looks of the crowd aboard, knew that he had a choice cargo of trouble in this respect—trouble that might even now be starting.

But the quarrel below died down as quickly as it had started—so he started his customary tour of inspection. First came inspection of the cargo, the boilers, and the engines; then the time-honored ceremony of selecting the best deckhand by the simple expedient of letting aspirants for the honor fight it out. That done, he undertook what would be the real inspection for this trip—examination of the passenger quarters and a look-see at the passengers.

At first glance everything seemed in order, as much as a packet load of trappers, plainsmen, settlers and gamblers could be expected to be in order. The few married couples aboard had retreated discreetly to the women's cabin in the after portion of the boat. Many of the quieter sort among the men had disposed themselves in favorable spots along the little passageway running around the cabins, and were watching the monotonous procession of hills, trees and muddy farms that slipped to the rear as the *Eagle* chugged and plopped up-stream.

Yet there were signs of trouble, exactly where it might be expected—among the free lances gathered in the forward cabin, handy to the bar. As he passed through, Andy noticed that Jake and one or two others of the gamblers had started little games; and he noticed something ominous about Jake's conduct. For once Jake's mind was not on the cards. He was keeping one ear cocked to hear the talk at the bar, and the talk did not promise peace for the balance of the voyage. Two or three times Andy caught the sure catchwords of trouble—"free soil" and "states' rights." Jake's erstwhile companion, the little farmer, was an active talker in a group of free-soil men. The chances looked excellent for trouble within an hour.

Captain Andy, however, merely shrugged. That was all part of the business, something every Missouri River captain faced, just as he faced the snags and sand bars of the river. He had more important cares this trip, and it was time he was seeing to them—commencing with a visit to his reinforcements, the soldiers.

Because of the *Eagle's* reputation for ability to take care of herself, he had decided the night before to keep Tompkins and his men out of sight unless absolutely needed. Therefore he had turned his cabin over to them, with orders to keep the blinds drawn, keep quiet, and not stir out unless summoned. So he climbed to the texas deck, and started for his cabin abaft the wheelhouse to see how they were standing the drastic regimen.

But the visit was not made. As he laid hand on the door knob, a burst of brutal laughter rang out below, and a light footstep sounded on the deck behind him. He whipped around, only to recoil hastily. The newcomer was a woman, the very one Jake had helped aboard, and she was visibly perturbed. Her face was working beneath her sunbonnet, and she was wringing her hands under cover of her shawl. Evidently trouble for the voyage had begun.

CAPTAIN ANDY whipped off his cap, and stepped toward her. At the same moment another laugh rang out below—with an uglier quality this time. She started at the sound, and her terror deepened.

"What's the matter, ma'am?" Captain Andy asked, patting her on the arm. "Are they too rough for you below? You mustn't mind a little shouting and singing, you know."

"I don't," she answered in a choking voice. "But you must come, Captain. It's my poor Thomas—my husband—and they're—they're picking on him——"

Captain Andy choked back a curse. If he remembered correctly her husband was a mean-spirited little runt, just the sort a crowd of river toughs would pick on for

amusement. Still, here was his wife, and she was distressed about it.

Still another stentorian laugh rang out from below—one with the ugliest quality of all. At the sound Andy jumped.

"Don't you worry, ma'am," he called, and darted for the stairs. Three ape-like jumps, with his huge hands and long arms swinging him along on the stair-rails, brought him to the cabin deck, and he scuttled in to the forward saloon. For a moment his eyes, accustomed to the clean, bright air of the texas deck, saw nothing through the haze of tobacco smoke that eddied and billowed inside the cabin, as the passengers milled about in it. Then his vision cleared, and he saw the trouble.

There was a break in the crowd, and in the break was the little farmer. And Jake's game, started earlier in the morning, had broken up—for the little farmer was held by the collar almost clear of the floor by Jake himself, a giant in comparison. Unquestionably, events had moved quickly in the few minutes Andy had been away.

At that moment Jake shook his erstwhile companion with one hand, and took a glass of whisky from the bar with the other.

"So you're a temperance man, are you?" he roared. "Well, it's time you drank to what you believe, so put it down like a little man. Come on now—one, two——"

But the "three" was never uttered. A long arm swept up between him and the little man, breaking his grip. Then a red and club-like fist hit him once, square on the point of the chin. He spun back against the crowd, grabbed for the bar, missed it, and slumped to a sitting posture on the floor. From there he stared upward, his eyes spinning oddly, at the figure towering over him.

"No, you don't," growled Andy from the depths of his barrel-like chest, as he swayed on two short legs that bowed outward, as though they had given way somewhat beneath the weight of his massive torso. "Not on the *Eagle*, anyhow. You tend to your business, and let this man tend to his. Get that plain?"

He waved a fist in front of the other's nose, then turned to the little man. He had learned nothing of the right and wrong of the affair, but he knew the thing to do right now. He must get the combatants separated and give them time to cool down, out of sight of each other.

"Come on," he said to the little chap. "Your wife's waiting for you on the texas deck. Better come with me."

"Goin' to join the ladies?" came a mocking call from the crowd. It stopped short as Andy whirled about. Thereafter the crowd was silent, while he piloted his charge to the cabin door.

"You'd better stay on the texas deck a while," he said. "Here, Sam!" he called to a nearby deckhand. "Take this gentleman above, and see that he and his wife have chairs."

Content to dismiss the matter at that, he slapped the little farmer on the back and turned away. But the farmer did not accept the dismissal.

"Cap'n," he said, and stopped. Andy wheeled.

"Yes?" he queried, impatient to be gone. "Don't bother with any thanks. It's all in the job, you know."

"'Tain't that," said the other, "though I'm sure grateful. But seein's how you helped me, I thought I'd help you. There's trouble comin' for this boat—trouble I know about—and I want to tell you what it is."

Captain Andy's impatience vanished instantly. This might be news that would point the way through all the *Eagle's* troubles. All other business could wait on a prospect of learning anything like that.

"Trouble coming, you say!" he exclaimed. "What kind of trouble?"

The little man answered Yankee-fashion—with another question.

"Ever hear tell of the Turnbulls?"

"The Turnbulls!" Captain Andy echoed, then stopped.

The other needn't have asked if he had heard. He had, all too often. So had all the other river men, and the United States Government, and the perplexed government of the state. The Turnbulls were the most noted band of desperadoes west of the Mississippi at that time, and their territory one hundred and fifty miles up the river was shunned as though afflicted with the plague, so ruthless had been their operations.

And mention of their name almost made further information about the nature of the trouble superfluous. If the Turnbulls were concerned, Captain Andy knew just what the *Eagle* might expect, and about when the blow would fall. The thing worth hearing would be any details the little fellow might know.

"Yes, I've heard of them," Andy answered grimly. "What about them?"

The little man's face twisted into a sardonic smile, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"Well, it's this way," he replied. "There's some of their men on board, I think, and I heard them talking. This Jake's one of them. And when you get down in the Turnbull country, these men are goin' to jump you, and the rest is comin' aboard. You're goin' to be raided. That's what it is."

Raided! Well, that was what he expected, Captain Andy told himself. But how did this little fellow know about it—and what more did he know? Could it be that he was betraying confidences reposed in him by Jake before they came aboard? He seized the other's arm in an eager grip.

"What else?" he demanded. "Who was it you heard talking—and where?"

The other shook his head.

"I didn't see 'em," he answered. "They was around a corner over there." He pointed to the narrow gangway, leading aft outside the starboard cabins. "I thought I knew that big brute's voice when he picked on me. I don't know no more than I told you."

But as he said it, Andy suddenly caught reason to doubt the statements. During the brief colloquy the little man's shiftiness, and his way of glancing sidewise at the river, had tended to confirm the captain's low estimate of him. But now, after making his denial, he came through with a glance as steely and straight as a rifle barrel. Evidently he was not the weakling he had seemed.

Plainly, too, his denial of further knowledge was false, else why should he have revealed himself in his anxiety to know how the statement was received?

Still, if he chose to stop there, Andy saw no way of making him go on. Not now, at any rate. So he asked an aimless question or two, then thanked the other and gave up. The farmer started for the texas deck and Captain Andy, anxious to turn over this strange new turn of affairs in his mind, started to follow. But with the other there, his favorite nook at the port rail would be untenable, he reflected suddenly; so as second choice he started for Harker's cabin.

THE awed crowd parted, yielding him a clear passage to the purser's office, and he entered, shutting the door behind him. Harker, Whose reddened, perspiring face showed the effects of a busy morning, looked up with alarm that turned to relief as he recognized his visitor.

"It's you!" he exclaimed. "I'm jolly glad, after all that's happened. Looked to me like you'd get killed if you kept on like you were going."

"What do you mean?" Andy asked. "Been worrying 'cause I calmed down that fellow Jake a while ago, when he was picking on the little farmer?"

"The farmer Oatsby? Partly that. I couldn't see where Oatsby was worth worrying about. Why didn't you let them fight?"

"Can't have that sort of doings on the *Eagle,* for one thing," Andy explained. "And for another, it let me in on something I wouldn't have known otherwise. You'll agree it was worth a fight when you hear what this fellow—Oatsby, you said his name was—told me."

Briefly he repeated Oatsby's news, with enough in addition to make the situation clear. The way Harker's jaw dropped and the color drained from his face told eloquently enough what he thought. For a moment he said nothing. Then speech came with a rush.

"But these Turnbulls! Where'll we run into them, and what are they like?"

Captain Andy grinned, though with a light of battle in his eyes.

"Well, they're the toughest gang this country has ever seen, and they work about a hundred miles up the river from here. So we'll run into them first thing tomorrow morning, less'n the *Eagle* hits a snag or a sandbar between here and there."

"Good Lord!" Harker exclaimed. That doesn't give us much time to get ready for them. What are we going to do about it?"

"That," drawled Andy, seating himself, "is what I came to talk about. And I'm talking, 'stead of deciding, 'cause this time I'm up a tree."

He paused, drumming his fingers on the chair arm, while Harker stared. Then he explained.

"If it was just the Turnbulls," he said, "I wouldn't worry two minutes 'bout it. If we couldn't lick them, we'd deserve whatever happened. Jake and his gang make it more troublesome; but I could figure to handle them same time as the Turnbulls. But it sticks in my mind that we'll have more than that to worry about.

"That shipment of money there—" he nodded at the strongbox—"is what gets me. I can't see where it comes in, yet I'll bet it's at the bottom of everything."

"Of course it is," Harker broke in. "The reason for it's plain enough, seems to me. It's bait to draw trouble, and 'pon my word, it's been successful! And the bank's not the loser if the Turnbulls get it. That chap Townley said it was insured. So Blake wouldn't have trouble talking them into shipping it by the *Eagle*, where it'd be sure to make trouble for us."

But Andy shook his head.

"You don't know Blake," he replied. "He's been a tough operator for the last ten years, and he hasn't done anything by halves yet. He might ship the money by us to cause us trouble, but he'd go on and arrange the trouble, too. Likewise he'd have more'n a plain gang fight in his scheme, less'n he's changed his ways.

"No, there's something more to it, something we don't see at all. And it's my guess the trouble'll pop right when we're in the middle of things with the Turnbulls.

"Another thing I don't like is this fellow Oatsby and his fight with Jake. Maybe I didn't tell you; but when they came on the boat, they were thick as thieves. Then an hour later we find them fighting—and on top of that Oatsby lets out all he knows 'bout Jake. Looks funny to me."

"I don't see why," Harker returned. "Their fallin' out is natural enough, for ruffians of that stamp. And after they fell out, why shouldn't a little rat like Oatsby revenge himself by telling all he knew?"

"Because he isn't a rat of that sort," Andy declared roundly. "He's got nerve enough to fight his own battles, if I'm any judge of human nature. He wouldn't run telling stories without he had a reason.

"Well, it's a tangle, if there ever was one—what's that?" the captain demanded suddenly.

He pointed to a banknote lying on the table beside the strongbox. Harker handed it to him.

"It's counterfeit, I believe," he explained. "This fellow Jake paid it over the bar and I'm not sure—you have so many banknotes in this country—but it doesn't look right to me. So I held it out to see what you thought of it."

Captain Andy took the bill and scanned it. It was a ten-dollar note, issued by an Ohio bank, and a moment's inspection confirmed Harker's opinion of it. The erratic workmanship left no doubt that the bill was counterfeit.

But if Jake had passed one counterfeit—acting upon a sudden idea Andy rushed to the strong box, demanded the key from Harker, and scrutinized the money. However, his idea had to be abandoned as quickly as it had come. Unquestionably the money in the box was genuine. He had made no mistake the night before on that score.

Then on the heels of the discarded notion, came another—a bizarre, fantastic notion. But as Andy tested it against every question that had troubled him, one by one it answered them. So far as he could see, the riddle had been read!

"I bet I've got it!" he explained. "I've got what Blake's up to now—and he's never hatched anything better, I can tell you! The Turnbulls ain't more than a starter in the scheme. If we hadn't seen through it he'd have had us nailed, even if we killed every Turnbull in the lot!"

He all but capered in his excitement, while Harker looked increasingly blank.

"But see here!" the bewildered purser demanded. "I can't follow you at all. What is the bally scheme, now that you've guessed it?"

Relief over seeing his way clear through the tangle of troubles ahead had sent Andy's spirits skyhigh.

"Why, it's plain as daylight!" he replied. "Just put together everything that's happened, and you can't miss it. Don't you get the idea?"

"No, 'pon my word I don't," Harker snapped. "If you know what they're up to, why keep it a confounded secret? Why not out with it?"

Captain Andy laughed. Harker's angry impatience made the temptation to tease irresistible. He glanced at his watch, letting Harker wait, then rose leisurely to his feet.

"I tell you what I'll do," he said. "It's nearly noon now, and there ain't time to explain before we eat. But I'll do better than tell you. I'll *show* you—either in the next half hour or 'bout supper time—and I'll bet ten dollars that you'll see their game without my saying a word. Is it a go?"

"Ten dollars—two pounds—of course!" the purser agreed. It will be worth that to know what's what. But——"

"Never mind," said Andy. "There's ten dollars up, and I've got to get ready to scoop it in, so I'll be off to get things started. Just one thing——" He stopped at the door as he said this, and was suddenly serious. "Don't leave this office for any reason—*any* reason, not if the boat takes fire—till I come back, even if I stay all afternoon. Likewise don't be surprised

at what happens overhead in the next half hour. And last of all—" his gaiety returned again—"you can kiss your ten gooy-by, 'cause it's mine or I'm the biggest liar that ever navigated the Missouri, which is saying plenty!"

III

AS ANDY made his way through the forward cabin, where the stewards were finishing preparations for the noonday meal amidst the press of drinkers, his solution of Blake's scheme looked better and better to him. Likewise he saw now exactly what to do, provided his notion was verified on one point, the point he had engaged to settle with Harker's ten as a premium.

There was another difficulty—that of getting Tompkins, the non-commissioned officer, to fall in with his plan. From what he had seen of Tompkins, however, that promised to be easy. The other question remained the important one.

First he sought the *Eagle's* carpenter, and procured a brace and bit. Then he went to his cabin on the texas deck, knocked on the door, and entered.

At first glance after entering, it seemed that the cabin was empty. Then in the half light that was all the carefully screened windows would admit he descried Tompkins and his men. Like soldiers of all times and lands, they believed in resting whenever possible. Two were sprawled on Andy's bed. Tompkins had the couch. The others had unrolled their blankets on the floor and were lying on them. Only the muskets, gleaming dully from where they were stacked against the wall, showed readiness for trouble.

As Andy looked, Tompkins rose.

"Any trouble, Captain?" he inquired. "If there is, you can lead us to it. We're tired of sticking around doing nothing."

"Looks like you're tired," Andy commented dryly, as three or four heads popped up seal-like from the blankets. "No, there ain't any trouble—yet. I just dropped in to see how you were getting on, and do a little work."

The heads dropped back again on the blankets, but Tompkins descried the brace and bit, and his expression lightened with interest.

"What's the borer for?" he demanded.

"Making repairs, or is that part of the game?"

"You'll see," Andy returned, as he estimated a distance on the floor. His cabin, he knew, as directly over Harker's office, and he wanted to pick a spot immediately over an inner corner of the space below. Selecting the proper spot, he began to bore, while the soldiers crowded around.

"What's doing now?" one of the livelier spirits queried. "Who are you looking in on—or are you going to take a pot shot at him?"

"That," Andy muttered, "depends on what happens. But you're talking too much. There's passengers hanging around on deck outside, and I don't want them to hear you."

The men fell back, and Andy nodded to Tompkins to draw close. The non-commissioned officer came and knelt beside him.

"I want to ask you, Sergeant," Andy said in a low tone, "have you ever heard of the Turnbull gang?"

Tompkins' face hardened swiftly.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "That gang has knocked off two of my pals now, different times we was taking trains through their country. I've heard of them all right. Why, are they fixing to make trouble for us?"

Captain Andy exulted. This was even better than he had hoped. With Tompkins bearing a grudge against the Turnbulls, winning him to his plans would be easy.

"Yes, they are," he said. "But seeing that I know about it in advance, I think if you'll help, we can fix them so it'll be their last trouble making for quite a while."

"Can you!" Tompkins exclaimed. "Just say what you want, then. We're with you to get them, any way you think'll work."

"That's great; Now I'll tell you my notion. First, we could just beat the Turnbulls off, if we were willing to let it go at that. But then they'd just go back into the woods, and be all ready to raise Ned the next time they saw a chance. If we want to finish them we've got to get behind them—cut off their retreat and corner them."

Tompkins' eyes lighted with understanding.

"That's right," he said. "And we'll corner them right while they're raiding—no chance to argue with the judge about anything. I get your idea, all right."

Andy's smile broadened. Tompkins was proving admirable.

"I'm glad you see it that way," he said.

"So I'll tell you my scheme, and I'll bet you'll like it.

"Here's how I figure it out. The only stop I've got in Turnbull country is at Spring Landing early tomorrow morning, so that's where I think they'll try to hit us. Probably they shipped the stuff I've got to land, to make sure I'd put in. And that's where we'll have to get them.

"To do that, I figure I'd better put you off, soon as we tie up for the night, a few miles this side of the landing. If you don't know, we never run at night on the Missouri. The channel shifts too much, and has too many snags. Then you can work along the river, and hide in the bushes behind the landing.

"You'll find a sort of bluff, with a lot of underbrush on it, 'bout thirty yards behind the landing. There's a store there, and a little dock they've built, so you can't miss the place. You can lay in the brush till we show up, and the Turnbulls come down to the landing. Then when we fire from the boat, you can jump them from behind, and we've got them."

The bit lunged forward at that moment, and captain Andy withdrew it from the completed hole. Peering through, he saw Harker staring upward in astonishment. Also he made sure he could see the door and the shelf where the strong box was. Satisfied, he stood up and addressed Tompkins.

"Well, what do you say to it?"

"It's all fine," Tompkins said, "and we'll do it. But just one thing. What if they jump you tonight, while you're tied up?"

"I don't think they will. They like to work on horseback, and where I'll tie up, they couldn't get a horse within half a mile of us. But if they should try—well, you can leave that to me. Satisfactory?"

"Yes," Tompkins replied. "I've heard about you, and I know you can handle them. Now what's this for, and what'll we do about it?"

He pointed to the newly bored hole. Captain Andy considered.

"Well," he answered, "I can't tell exactly what there'll be to see, but I've got a hunch. So if you want something to do this afternoon, you might have your men take turns watching and see that nothing happens to Harker. I don't think there'll be anything doing, though, till 'bout sunset. I'll be back then, and we'll see if I'm right. Suit you?"

Tompkins held out his hand.

"It's a deal," he said, "and we'll put it over."

UNSET found the boat *plop-plopping* her way along a desolate, bluff-bordered stretch of the tawny river a good hundred miles above St. Louis, seeking a favorable spot in which to tie up for the night. A mile or so ahead Andy expected to reach an island that would be just right, provided the breakup of the winter ice and the spring floods hadn't washed it away or screened it with a barrier of snags. Failing the island, any spot from which Tompkins could get on the north shore, and which couldn't be reached without a ship, would do. For all his confidence in the *Eagle's* ability to take care of herself, Andy had no intention of risking a surprise attack.

The *Eagle* rounded a turn in the river, and the island came into sight. From his post inside the wheelhouse, he smiled as he scanned it. For once the Missouri had been kind. The island was accessible and suitable in every way for a stop. He turned to Smith, the first mate, who was standing near.

"You can make your landing there," he said, pointing, "and get out a wood gang. Better lay in enough to last all day tomorrow. We may not get any at Spring Landing."

He had not told the mate about the raid, but there was no need as yet. It was quite usual on the river, when not in Indian country, to lay in a day's supply of wood for the boilers at the night stop, and save the daylight hours for running. The mate therefore merely nodded, and continued to scan the surface of the water for the telltale ripples that warned of new mud bars and hidden snags.

With a last look ahead, Andy left the wheel and made his way toward Harker's office. During the afternoon the forward cabin, he could see, had become a sample of the frontier at its wildest. The air was blue with smoke, which filled the space almost to the occlusion of vision. Before the bar was a milling crowd, growing noisier and more obstreperous every minute, as the fast-flowing whisky fed their tempers. Recklessness was in the air in explosive quantity, ready to break out into mischief on any excuse or no excuse at all. Even the morning fear of him had gone, and he had to work his way through as best he

could, catching murmurs of heated talk at every step.

Harker, who had remained in his stuffy quarters continuously save when Captain Andy had spelled him for the noonday meal, exhibited heartfelt relief at the skipper's entrance.

"I hope," he said, "you'll let me out for just a bit of a turn about the deck before sunset. I'd like to catch a breath of air and see a bit of the country, you know."

Captain Andy laughed.

"You'll see all you want and then some before we reach the Dakotas," he retorted. "It's time now that we settled about your ten dollars. Before we go, though, have you seen anything more of Oatsby?"

Harker's face clouded.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "and he's up to devilment of some sort, I'll warrant. He's thick as thieves with a crowd of passengers, chaps of the free soil party, and they've been hooting at Jake and his crowd all afternoon. I've been watching them through the window there, and several times I thought a row would start. That would be a nice mess, wouldn't it, along with our other worries?"

Captain Andy nodded. A fight, in itself, he didn't mind much. What he had seen coming through the cabin made that a certainty within a few hours, anyway. But with Oatsby and Jake in it, the trouble could be started whenever it suited their needs. That would prove awkward, for undoubtedly the trouble would start when he should be paying attention to the money.

However, nothing could be done about it; so he nodded and rose.

"Yes," it would be a mess," he agreed, "and a worse one than you think. But it all fits in with my notion of what they're up to, so we might as well stick to the scheme we have—beginning with raking in your ten dollars. This, I think, is the time to do it, so you'd better close your office and come along."

Harker obeyed with alacrity, putting the little office into order in a trice. Then, stepping out and closing the door, he drew his key, snorting with disgust as he looked at it.

"What a toy to turn on that money," he grumbled. "If only you had one of those good new Bramah locks, now——"

"How'd you feel," Captain Andy broke in, "if I told you Blake's bank owned the *Eagle* once, and probably Blake's hooked a duplicate of that key from them? Oh, it's all right," he added hurriedly, as Harker turned a surprised face up from his stooped position. "If I didn't think he had it, I wouldn't have guessed his scheme, and I wouldn't be able to win your money. Now come along and watch me do it."

On re-entering the forward cabin, Andy looked about but without success, to locate Jake and Oatsby. In the confusion nothing short of a detailed search would have proved whether or not they were there. Neither was it worth stopping for; so Andy piloted Harker to his cabin.

"I guess you know Mr. Harker," he told the soldiers by way of introduction. "You ought to, if you've been watching all afternoon."

"Sure we know him," one of the soldiers chirruped. "I could tell him anywhere by the way he blushes on that bald spot atop of his head."

"All right," Andy said, when the laughing had subsided. "I guess you didn't see much, if that's what you watched. But I didn't think you'd see anything till now. And maybe even now we'll be disappointed and——"

But in that he was proved a false prophet. Almost before the words had left his mouth an angry shout rang out below—then another, and still another, until they blended into a muffled roar. Sounds of splintering wood became audible; and even through the deck everyone in the group could hear the rush and surge of bodies in the forward cabin. Evidently the moment they had left, Jake or Oatsby or somebody had touched the proverbial match to the explosive situation, and pandemonium had broken loose.

"Stand fast!" Andy bellowed, as several of the soldiers reached for their muskets. "It's a trick—I'll tend to it!

"You, Harker, watch that hole as if your life depended on it. And you hold your men here, Tompkins, and don't show yourself, less'n I send for you!"

AS HE whipped out the door Andy cursed inwardly over the necessity of leaving. But he forgot his chagrin the moment he entered the cabin below and took in the scene. A confused free-for-all was in progress, wrapped in billowing smoke. The cabin lamps, shedding their smoky yellow light upon the scene, were growing fewer, as one after another was knocked from its stand or smashed by a flying missile. The shouts

and imprecations told that, the pro- and anti-slavery feeling had broken loose.

The second mate, coming from behind, jostled Andy and pointed to the forward deck, where the crew was massing.

"We're all here," he shouted above the din. "What'll we do now?"

"Get 'em inside the door and in a double line," Andy barked as he forced his way inward from the door. A few lunges and blows cleared a space, and the crew jammed in. Forcing their way, they marshaled themselves as directed.

"Now sweep 'em!" Andy roared, and started for the bar.

It was tough going, every inch of it, and a case of dealing with each opponent man to man. Obstreperous ones Andy floored when there was room to swing on them. Others he pushed headlong into the mêlée, to bowl over still others. The more peaceable, or those of flagging energy, he seized and flung behind his line of helpers.

Twice a chair swung through the air at his head. Once he ducked. The second time the chair caught him a glancing blow with one of its rungs. He bellowed and charged into the crowd after the man he thought had thrown it. Catching him, he hurled him against one, then another, of the rioters nearby, until he had cleared a ring; then let the man, unconscious by now, slump to the floor.

That ended the rioting. Several of the crew burst pell-mell into the opening, enlarged it, and soon had all the combatants pushed against one or another of the walls. That done, the sailors stood watching their prisoners and awaiting orders, while Andy glanced about appraising the situation. And now that the fight was over he thought again of his responsibilities on the texas deck.

"Damn!" he exclaimed, and beckoned to the second mate. "Chase them all to the cargo," he directed, with a sweeping gesture toward the rioters, "and keep them there until you get this in order. I'll send word what I want you to do next in a minute or two."

With a dismal certainty that under cover of the riot Blake's men had put something over, he scuttled back to his cabin. No words were needed to tell him that his fears were justified. The evident consternation of Harker and Tompkins was ample testimony to that.

"Well, what's happened?" he demanded, as both started to talk at once and failed. "Something's gone wrong, I'll bet a hundred!"

"Maybe," Tompkins said, as Harker sputtered, "and maybe not. Go on, tell him!" he continued, jogging Harker. "You saw it. I didn't."

"Why—why—" Harker began, and stopped. But the sound of his voice proved steadying, and after a moment his story came with a rush.

"I was watching there while the riot was going on, when the door to my office opened, and somebody whipped in——"

"Somebody! Who?" Andy interrupted.

"Couldn't tell," Harker snapped back. "Had a black hood or something over his head. He came in, looked around, and then——"

"Yes, go on!" Andy barked. The hood was something he hadn't counted on, though it didn't matter much. If the man did as he expected, he could find him quickly enough. "Get your breath and let's have it."

"Why—" Harker's eyes were hollow with despair now—"he blew out the light, and that's all we saw!"

"Blew out the light—" Andy echoed, then stopped as the full force of the news struck him.

All his plans, his preparations, his hopes for confirming his notion of Blake's scheme, had been blasted by this one action. He had been defeated by the simplest expedient possible!

"Well of all the damned lummoxes—" he commenced, then stopped again. It was hard to believe that he had overlooked anything so simple, that he could have been so stupid. Then he pulled himself together. There was no use in crying over spilled milk now. He might better be doing something to retrieve the situation.

"Come on, Harker," he exclaimed, starting for the door. "Let's see what we can see now, anyway."

His first fear he discovered was unfounded. The strongbox was still on its shelf, lock in place and apparently in order.

"Let's see how it is inside," Andy commanded, and Harker, applying his key, threw up the lid. As it opened, Captain Andy could see that the box was filled. Under the full light which poured upon the contents when the lid was thrown back, everything seemed in order.

"Thank God!" Harker said. "Now what do you suppose he was up to? Or do you think he was scared off? Anyway, we're clear of trouble now."

But Andy was not listening. He picked up two or three packets of bills, scanned them and replaced them. His brows were

knitted and gloomy determination was in his eyes when he faced the purser.

"Instead of being safe," he said, "we're worse off than ever: If he'd tampered with the money it would have meant my guess at their scheme was right, and I'd have known just how to beat them. But he didn't—so now I'm up a tree higher'n ever about their scheme.

"And don't kid yourself he was scared away. It's simply that their game runs deeper than we think."

He extracted a roll of bills from his pocket, peeled off a ten and handed it to Harker.

"There you are," he said. "I'm beat. The only thing I can think of now is to watch everything that goes on, and hope we can move faster than they do. So we'll try that—and God help us if we don't see and move fast enough!"

IV

DURING the supper hour Andy acted swiftly to start his campaign of seeing everything. A member of the crew was stationed on the narrow alleyway outside the cabins on each side of the packet; stewards were told off to patrol the inside corridors unobtrusively but without letup; and he arranged with Harker to take turn and turn about guarding the money through the night. And all this while he was cursing to himself—cursing his foolhardiness, his cocksure folly in deserting the money even for an instant.

"No fool like an old fool," he told himself as he concluded his patroling arrangements. "Less'n it be an old fool who thinks he's an old fox—which means me.

"Well—there'll be no more old foxing on this boat between here and Iowa. It'll be plain bulldog and watchdog now—hang on and keep all eyes open—and I hope it will turn the trick!"

It was night by the time he completed his dispositions, and the brooding silence of the region, broken only by the murmur from the forward cabin and the hiss of the current sweeping past the *Eagle's* sides, did not help restore good spirits. For a moment, as he leaned elbows on the texas deck rail and let himself peer into the blackness toward where he knew the north shore to be, he let depression sweep over him. Then he shook himself.

"Never get anywhere by moping," he muttered. "Might as well be up and at 'em. Plenty to do yet before it's time to rest."

He sought his cabin, where the buoyant spirit of the soldiers as they busied themselves making final preparations, restored him to cheerfulness. Now that he was in the dark as to Blake's plans he was loath to let them go. But nothing that had happened had made his campaign against the Turnbulls seem less sound; so with inward trepidation he watched the squad embark in the *Eagle's* two small boats and saw them swallowed up by darkness.

By now, though it was fairly early by the clock, nearly everyone had turned in. A glance in the forward cabin showed it almost empty, save for two or three card games at the tables. Neither Jake nor Oatsby was in sight. It was time for the crowning step in his preparations—crippling the party on board by arresting their leader, Jake.

He commenced by turning out the first mate, Smith, with orders to get a reliable deckhand and join him on the forward end of the cabin deck. That done, he repaired to the appointed spot and waited until two shadowy forms approached through the darkness.

"Ready, Cap'n," Smith retorted. "What'll we do now?"

"Follow me," Andy said. "Halt when I tell you, then close in when I call or whistle. And keep quiet as death meantime. One peep out of any of you'll spoil everything."

He led the little party aft in the starboard alleyway until near Jake's cabin, where he signed to them to stop. As he did so, his watchman on that side drew near, a poised pistol showing dimly through the darkness in his hand. He replaced it in his belt upon recognizing them and after a whispered word resumed patroling, while Captain Andy tiptoed the rest of the way to Jake's cabin.

The cabin, when he reached it, presented closed door and blinds, with only a tiny spot of light winking through the key hole. Captain Andy considered—then applied his ear. After all, it was fair enough to learn what he might be running into. And then he had slim ground for arresting Jake—just Oatsby's story, which might or might not be true, and his own conjectures. It would be helpful if he could hear something that would justify his action before taking it.

A confused murmur was his only re-

ward at first. Then Jake's voice came clear.

"Well, you don't have to come along. You're in the clear now, and you can take to your bunk, or run to the captain, when the shooting starts. We don't want you around, anyway. We need men in this business—not white-livered sneaks."

Captain Andy could not make sense out of the snarling reply. Neither could he tell what member of the gang was being allowed to drop out. But one point had been gained. Jake's one remark had been enough to sweep away any doubt about the coming foray.

Then out of the murmur Jake's voice came again, charged with ugliness this time.

"Get out! I've heard all the whinin' I'm goin' to listen to. I'm goin' to bed and I don't want to see you till the job's done."

The inner door opened and shut. That meant, Andy figured, that Jake was alone. A sound as of a heavy man seating himself on his bunk, followed by puffing and cursing as though Jake were pulling off one of his high boots, lent color to the notion.

This was the moment Andy wanted. Taking a skeleton key from his pocket, he slipped it quietly into the lock. He gathered himself for a rush, turned the key and flung the door wide in practically one motion, and stepped in, swinging the door closed behind himself.

"Evening, Jake," he said. "'S'pose you weren't expecting me."

Jake, as Captain Andy had thought, had been seated on the edge of his bunk, pulling off a boot. Now he looked up and tried to rise; but realized that with the boot half off he couldn't be up in time to accomplish anything. Glaring, he settled back.

"I wasn't," he growled, giving the boot a final tug and flinging it aside. "And I s'pose you think it's O. K. to horn in without being asked."

Captain Andy's face set.

"I wouldn't with any decent passenger," he retorted. "But with you it's different. I've come to tell you the jig is up."

Jake's face showed a flash of fright, then flooded crimson. He rose now and backed into a corner.

"What jig?" he demanded with a touch of bluster. "Don't go talking any riddles to me!"

"Cut it out, Jake," Andy snapped. "I know all about you and the Turnbulls, and I'm going to clean out the bunch of you. So you'd just as well not try bluffing. And I'm going to start by locking you up tonight.

"Then tomorrow morning, when your gang shows up, I'm going to have you ready to greet them—with one of my men on each side to blow your head off if you don't do as you're told. What you'll do is tell them the game's up, and they'd better surrender peaceful.

"Now pick up what you want for tonight and march."

For a moment Jake tried to face it out. But Andy's cold, contemptuous stare told that it would be no use. Sullenly Jake turned to pack, and Captain Andy relaxed his vigilance.

THAT was a mistake. Quick as a flash Jake jumped, and the impact took both to the floor, Jake on top. The gambler seized Andy's throat with one hand, and with the other reached for a knife.

Andy could hear men running outside, and knew that Smith, his helper, and the watchman had come up. But they did not enter; and he realized that they would not unless he could free himself enough to call. He must go it alone—and only a second or so would pass before the issue would be decided.

Now Jake rose a bit, propping himself against the hand on Andy's throat. The movement cut off all breath; but likewise it gave Andy his chance. Gathering all his strength, he jerked sidewise. The movement brought him free and he fought to rise.

But to his surprise Jake, with a gurgling cry, fell limp, writhed, then lay shuddering on the floor. Leaping to his feet, Andy saw the reason. His own movement had upset Jake, and the latter, rolling over, had fallen on his own knife! The fight was over as quickly as it had started.

Andy saw that Jake had flung the knife free before collapsing, and he picked it up. That done, he called, bringing the men from outside. At sight of Jake they stared, then looked questioningly at their skipper as he stood holding the weapon.

"It's his," Andy explained. "He fell on it while we were scuffling. Tell you more later, but now you'd better take him to my cabin. Call that doctor in stateroom 42, and tell him to wait with Jake still I get there. I'll be along in a few minutes."

He watched them carry Jake out, then

started searching the room. But now he had little heart for it. Thanks to the scuffle and its outcome, his plans had gone badly wrong. Jake couldn't be used now to warn the others off. Neither was the alternative—massing men in readiness to meet the onslaught—advisable. That would warn off everybody, and defeat his purpose of scotching the Turnbulls for good and all. There was nothing for it now but to fight both gangs at once.

"We can do it, though," he told himself. "And we will——"

He broke off as he espied something white protruding from the pocket of a coat hung on a hook. It was a letter envelope, without address or postmark, evidently a note for personal delivery.

Stepping to the light, Andy withdrew the enclosure and read it. It was was without superscripture and exceedingly short, as follows:

Remember, Peabody, I have your boy, and whether you see him or not after this depends on whether you come clean. One false step on your part and I'll blow on that Marietta job of yours, which will put your neck in the noose sure if ever you turn up in civilization. So be sure you COME CLEAN! *B.*

Captain Andy whistled.

"That's something, anyway," he muttered. "It's Blake's writing. That's his 'B,' sure 'nough. So there's a Peabody in it, and they've got a hold on him. Wonder who he is?"

He tapped the letter, pondering, then shrugged.

"There'll be time enough later to figure that out. Better finish here and get on to see how Jake's coming."

He placed the letter in his wallet and resumed his search. But after half an hour he gave up. Save for the letter, the cabin had yielded nothing that would throw light on Blake's scheme, and there was nothing further he could pry into. He extinguished the lamp, stepped out and locked the door.

"And that," he thought, "can be put down as my second fool stunt this trip. Might better have left things as they were, less'n this letter turns out to be something. And if Jake dies we'll have a mess next port we make, on top of all this other trouble."

But trouble from Jake's death, he learned, would not be added. The doctor, who was waiting in Andy's cabin, said that the wound, while crippling, would not prove fatal provided Jake was given rest and care. If given a steward to help he was willing, he said, to see the first night through.

"I suppose this fellow got into a brawl, Captain?" he went on. "Figured that was how he'd end up, after his actions today. By the way, I want to thank you for the why you've handled this trouble. It's been splendid."

"Oh, that's part of the work," Andy answered nervously. "No one could run a boat without being able to handle things like that, not on this river, anyhow. As to Jake, you guessed it. Tell you more about it tomorrow. But I wonder, could you tell me one thing? Do you know anyone among the passengers named Peabody?'

It was a wild shot. Andy knew it as he asked the question. Peabody, if he were aboard, undoubtedly would have an alias. And so it seemed, from the doctor's answer.

"No, I don't. What sort of a fellow is he?"

"I don't know him," Andy stated slowly. "All I know is the name. But I judge he's some kind of a crook—someone with a bad record."

"Peabody—Peabody—" the doctor muttered, then brightened. "You don't mean the counterfeiter, Isaac Peabody, who's wanted in Ohio? Thin fellow, short, middle aged, sharp as a gimlet and sly as all get out? They had papers out for him when we left St. Louis."

Andy shook his head.

"Couldn't say as to that, not knowing him. Well, I've got a lot to do tonight, and I'd better be getting on. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Peabody a counterfeiter—it was strange, Andy thought, as he went to send the steward requested by the doctor, how counterfeiting kept crossing the trail. It bore out his guess at Blake's scheme—renewed it, even though his ideas had been proved wrong at the time of the fight in the cabin. He snorted in disgust.

"You've had bright ideas enough for one day, Andy Corbin," he chided himself, "and you've muffed twice because of them. Cut it out now and tend to business."

With that admonition, he turned out the steward, sent him on his way, and joined Harker, to spend the night jumping whenever a board creaked, or the thud of a drifting tree against the packet's side made him think the attack had come.

WHEN the first gray flash of visibility was paling the stars and thinning the velvety blackness over the eastward tree tops, Andy yawned, shook Harker into wakefulness, and sought the deck. The nipping rawness of the misty dawn air felt good after the lamp-lit stuffiness of the little cabin, and revived his zest for action. He visited his sentinels on the cabin deck, found them sleepy but alert, then sought the cargo deck.

Here the tenseness of the cabin deck had no counterpart. The watchman, supposed to be on duty in the prow, had rolled himself in a blanket and was sleeping peacefully, regardless of the dewy diamonds which sprinkled his covering. The deckhands, burly, lawless fellows who ranked next to the Indians and bandits as terrors of the river, looked harmless as they snored comfortably in the warm space between the raised boilers and the cargo deck. Even the fireman, who theoretically was awake maintaining steam, leaped from a doze to inspect his gages when Andy approached. All these, at least, would be fresh when the fighting started, an hour or two after sunup.

By now gray light was permeating the forest. The moldy night smell was passing, and the birds were beginning to cheep, as they shook themselves awake. In the East a few lines of pink were streaking the sky. It was time to rouse the mates and get the *Eagle* going. With a last look about, Andy hastened to the texas deck.

"Shake a leg," he admonished Smith and his partner, as he tumbled them out. "We're going to have a fight in about an hour—with the Turnbulls."

Both mates bounded from their bunks, demanding particulars. While they dressed, Andy explained, including the story of the money; then he sent them to get breakfast and launch preparations for the encounter. Within ten minutes an excited crew was ashore casting off mooring lines and bringing aboard the last bit of wood that could be stowed, while others started building a barricade of cargo along the starboard side. Another ten minutes, and the paddle wheels began churning, sending the *Eagle* up-stream to whatever fate might hold in store for her.

Meanwhile Andy, over a cup of coffee, was giving instructions to Harker.

"You stay in your cabin," he said, "until the rumpus forward is over. And keep the [illegible] and your pistols ready. [illegible] we've got things quieted on board, you can come out and look to the passengers—excepting whatever Turnbull men we may be holding. Better get everyone else back in the women's cabin. Probably be safer there."

"Oh, but I say!" Harker protested. "I'd like to be in this, you know!"

"Of course you would," Andy replied, "but I'd rather not have you. You aren't on to such affairs yet, and you might pot one of our men as easy as a Turnbull. No, you'll help more staying here, than tending to the passengers—to say nothing of that being your job, anyway."

He finished his coffee and left for the cargo deck. A few of the passengers were up and about now, and Andy noticed that all of them classed among the toughest customers aboard. Undoubtedly they were Turnbull men, portents of the coming storm.

Nodding in response to a dour greeting or two, he passed through and below to where the first mate was waiting with a group of expectant deckhands.

"Ready, sir," the mate reported. "I've issued pistols, as you ordered."

The remark was superfluous, as the butts of the double-barreled derringers were peeping from the waistbands of the men. Andy's hand strayed to his pocket, to touch one of his two six-shot Colt's—the only specimen of the new guns on board, so far as he knew—and he glanced from one to another of the grinning, eager faces before him. They were true Missouri River deck hands, all of them, never so happy as when in a fight, and Andy's confidence mounted.

"It's our day, men," he told them, "and the whole river'll be talking about how we cleaned them. But don't go starting anything till I give the word.

"I'll be somewhere above when the shooting starts. At the first shot, come up and jump in, same as we did last night. But be careful who you shoot, and don't shoot at all unless you have to. Fists will do better, and you can swing them well enough. The pistols are just for emergency, if someone gets you down, or draws on you. Most of our shooting will be done outboard."

A shrill hoot from the whistle interrupted, and all glanced up the river. The *Eagle* was heading southwest now, to work around a massive bluff jutting out from the north shore. When she rounded the point and headed northwest, Spring Land-

ing would be visible about half a mile ahead on the starboard side. The whistle was the customary warning that she was coming; and it was time for Andy to be at his battle post.

Darting aft, he scrambled out a window, grasped the edge of the deck above, and hauled himself up to the little gallery outside the after cabins. Disdaining ceremony, he dashed through one of these, through the women's cabin, and into the corridor leading forward past Harker's office. There he lingered in the shadows, listening breathlessly for the signal that would start him into action.

For a few minutes the *Eagle* swept on, her paddles beating in the rhythm of full speed. Then a swing, perceptible enough to a seasoned veteran like Captain Andy, told that she was rounding the headland, and a faint tinkle below marked the signal "stand by" for the landing.

Another tinkle and the engines slowed to half speed. A minute or two passed, minutes that seemed eternities—a shout forward—and Andy knew that a heaving line had been thrown out. Another minute—the engines churned in a furious burst of paddling, then stopped. The *Eagle* was being made fast to the bank. And then, punctuating the silence, came the crack of a rifle shot. Then another, and then a fusillade. The battle was on at last!

V

AT THE first shot Andy leaped forward. Simultaneously a man appeared at the end of the corridor. For one revealing instant, in which time seemed standing still, the man was motionless. Then his arm rose; but Andy fired and the man fell. Andy leaped over him, and roaring defiance, lunged against the full impact of the gang's rush.

Instantly he was striking two, three ways at once—firing with one hand, swinging with another, kicking at anything brushing him. A pistol butt cracked down on his head; he gave under it, whirling as he did so, and came up with an uppercut to the jaw of his assailant. A shove sent the limp form crashing into the mob behind. A gorilla-like sweep of the captain's long right arm sent another after him; and Andy found himself in a little clearing.

One pistol was lost now and the other empty. Hurling it into the mob ahead he followed, diving under and rearing up to spill two more. Again he plunged, keeping always in the thick of them, carrying the battle to them, denying them the chance to use knife or bullet in the press of bodies.

For a space of minutes he was irresistible, master of everything. Then even his giant strength began to flag. He rallied, rushed again; but now he knew that help was needed. Where were Smith and his men? Why weren't they in it long ago? Would they never come?

The roar of musketry outside gave the answer, beat it into his surcharged brain even through the red battle lust. The forward gangway was swept by bullets; Smith's men couldn't come. The fight was up to him, and him alone.

Gritting his teeth, he rallied for his last plunge. He made it, spilled a man—felt a pin prick in his back. A knife had touched him finally——

A thudding impact on his back drove him to his knees. He lunged up, felt the knife again, went down once more. They were getting the upper hand, would beat him down unless help came.

A shout burst into his numbing brain—a shout and the reverberation of a charge that rallied his waning strength. He leaped to his feet, glanced about for a head to hit—and saw his men go sweeping past. Cut off forward, they had scrambled up the port side, and assailed the mob from the after cabin, as he had done!

He leaped forward, but the fight was over here. As he reached his men, they had cornered the remaining gangsters, jammed them in a helpless mass against the side of the cabin, and were dragging them forth one by one into custody of the guard Smith was forming.

But cessation of the fight made the firing outside deafening now. The victory still was scarce half complete. The gang on land might yet turn the scale.

Allowing himself one glance about the cabin, Andy scuttled into a starboard stateroom, brushed aside the pistol presented by the frightened occupant, and leaped to the window. A moment lapsed while he focused his spinning gaze, a task made more difficult by the drifting powder smoke. Then the situation stood revealed.

His own men, as he had planned, were safe, firing through loop-holes they had arranged in the cargo barricade. The Turnhills, their first rush checked by the *Eagle's* readiness, had dismounted and likewise taken cover behind the woodpiles scattered about the little clearing. It was stale-

mate, each side unable to move against the fire of the other.

But the *Eagle* held the key to the situation in the soldiers, unless Tompkins had slipped up. Eagerly Andy scanned the bluff to see evidence of the sergeant and his men.

As he did, several spurts of flame flecked the hillside. Some seconds passed, then another volley came. Now Captain Andy understood, and his heart went out to Tompkins. The seasoned non-com, wise in the ruse-and-tumble tactics of the country, had done the best thing possible. He had waited for the Turnbulls to spend their first enthusiasm and settle into the strain of sustained combat; and now he was picking them off when they could least stand something unexpected!

A hand clapped on Andy's shoulder and he whirled, to see Smith, panting but grimly triumphant.

"We got 'em," the first mate reported. "Sitting in a row, and men to shoot 'em if they bat an eyelash. All except three you did in for keeps, and some more too groggy to sit up. What'll we do next?"

"How many men can you spare?" Andy shot back.

"Five, I guess; maybe six," replied the mate.

"Bring them below, then, after me. We can use the stairs now. When we're all together we'll rush down."

A moment sufficed to form the little group at the forward door, and Andy cocked an ear to listen. Tompkins' diversion was effective; no bullets were whistling now. He whipped open the door, leaped down the stairs, and into the shelter of the cargo, the others trooping after.

By now the fight was nearly over. As Andy glanced through an opening, he saw several Turnbulls leap from behind woodpiles and scurry for the brush. A volley from the hillside dropped two; then eight gray-clad figures rose from the brush and, poising bayonet-tipped muskets, came pouring down the hill at them. The gangsters quailed, wheeled and headed for the boat.

That was the chance for the *Eagle's* men. Swarming around the sides of the barricade, they leaped to the shore, clubbed their guns, and charged their erstwhile assailants. But the ruffians had had enough. They and the others left unhit behind the woodpiles dropped to their knees, held up their hands, and the fight was over.

Now two tasks remained for Andy. The passengers, about whose ears this hurricane had burst so unexpectedly, must be reassured; and the safety of the bank's money must be established. Leaving Tompkins and the others to secure the prisoners, Andy hurried back to discharge these duties.

One job, however, did not arise. On rounding the corner into the corridor past the purser's office, Andy met Harker. The Englishman leaped forward and wrung the hand of his burly chief.

"Wonderful! Gigantic!" he burbled. "A regular Waterloo, 'pon my word! Don't see how you did it, single-handed for three minutes if it was a second, 'gainst that mob!"

Andy, grinning in embarrassment, wrenched his hand loose.

"There's still work to do," he said. "How are the passengers?"

Harker's gesture dismissed the passengers.

"Quite all right," he said. "Most of them stuck to their cabins. Those that didn't I herded aft. They're there now, buzzing it over. Don't worry about them."

"All right, then," Andy said. "There's still one thing I hope you haven't forgotten. We're still responsible for that money, you know."

Harker stared.

"Of course," he answered, "but why fret about it? I was with it all through the fight, and here's the door, still locked, just as I left it."

"Doesn't mean anything," Andy growled. "This fight wasn't the only string to Blake's bow, you know. Remains to be seen if he's pulled another while we were busy."

Still unconcerned, Harker opened the door and the two stepped in. The strong box was in place, apparently all right, just as it had been after the affray of the night before. Somewhat reassured, they opened it. The money still was inside, in order.

"You see?" Harker queried. "It's all right and safe enough. Look, here it is, the packets of small bills on top, just as we had them when we counted them in. Here's a pack of tens, and here are twenties, and here under them is the first pack of hundreds——"

Suddenly he cursed and plunged both hands into the box. For a few frantic moments he dug as a terrier digs into a hillside, giving each packet a bare instant's scrutiny before flinging it aside. When he had worked well into the heap, he paused and glanced up with ashen face.

"This—this is terrible!" he gasped. "Right when we'd licked them, too! We thought this chap hadn't done anything but

night, but we were wrong. Except for the top packets this money is—is *counterfeit!*"

COUNTERFEIT!" The echo came from the door like a whipcrack. Captain Andy and Harker whirled to see Smith and Tompkins standing there, scarcely able to believe what they had heard. Smith, knowing the story of the money, had let out the exclamation; and as they stepped in, he explained to Tompkins. Then the members of the little group stared at each other, white faced and silent.

All, that is, but Captain Andy. For the moment the others thought he had gone crazy. Instead of showing consternation, his face was lighting with joy!

"Counterfeit!" he exclaimed, jumped for the box, and verified the pronouncement. Then he whipped about, flung his cap to the ceiling, and, seizing the astounded Harker by the arms, began dancing about the cabin.

"Counterfeit sure enough," he chortled, "and that makes everything right as it should be! My notion was right, and we're out of the woods in fine shape now!"

He stopped and grinned at the three, whose countenances plainly showed their dumb amazement. Then he pointed at Harker, and let out a roar of laughter.

"You don't see it yet!" he chuckled. "After all the time you've had to think about it! "But it means Blake's shot his bolt now—got rid of the last arrow in his quiver—and we can catch up the man who did it! So it's all clear sailing now. Just watch me clean things up!"

He dashed into the corridor, all three of them, and to their amazement turned, not forward to assail one of the prisoners, but aft toward the women's cabin. About halfway he stopped and hammered on one of the cabin doors.

"Open up there!" he bellowed. "Open up before I kick the door in!"

Harker identified the cabin as that occupied by the farmer, Oatsby—then jumped as a muffled shot sounded from within. Captain Andy leaped aside, then reached forward one long arm, and pounded his fist on the door again.

"Come on!" he called. "No more funny business, or I'll wring your neck!"

The answer to that was another shot. Andy stood motionless, body and arm out of range, until it had sounded; then he leaped to a position before the door, hurled his bulk against it, and burst in. There was a momentary scuffle, followed by silence; then Andy's voice rang out.

"Come on!" he called. "Catch him when I toss him out!"

Harker and Tompkins reached the door just as Oatsby, bent almost double, catapulted between them, fetching his head a resounding thwack against the opposite wall. As he wavered from the stunning shock they seized him, jerked him upright, and Tompkins held him pinned against the wall.

"I've got him nailed," he grunted. "See to the captain, Harker."

"No need," a cheery voice called, and Andy appeared in the door, a bulky object in his hands. After one glance Harker gasped with joy. It was a duplicate of the strong box which had contained the bank's money. But Andy blocked his attempt to seize it.

"Wait," he directed, "and take that fellow to your office." He nodded at the pinioned Oatsby. "We'll straighten out everything up there."

Within a few moments they were comfortably disposed—all except Oatsby, who was held in a corner by Tompkins; and Harker, key poised, at the strong box Andy had retrieved.

"All right," Andy said. "Open up and let's see what's what."

In a trice the box was open and they were peering eagerly inside. It was filled with money in regular stacks, just as the other was. Plunging his hand into the middle of the mass, Harker drew forth a packet, riffled it, and handed it to Andy. The latter examined a few bills, then smiled.

"Right," he said. "This is good money, the real money, just as we put it in back there in St. Louis. Oatsby here was clevcrer than we thought. Figured there mightn't be time, I s'pose, to switch the money, so he had a duplicate box, and just switched boxes, contents and all. And he had brains enough to salt the top of his box with real money, in case we looked into it. Blake fixed things at the bank, I'll bet, so that the cashier would hand us the packets of small bills last, the way he did. That would bring them on top, and it'd cost least to duplicate them for the fake box. He's a canny player, that fellow Blake, I tell you!"

He wagged his head solemnly as he stared at Oatsby, then reached forward suddenly, seized the little farmer by the

coat collar, and hauled him into the middle of the room.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, his old-time twinkle in his eyes, "we might as well clean up the last mystery. This fellow passes as Oatsby, the farmer. But seein's how he's given us so much worry, we might as well know him right."

Sudden pressure from his clutching paw at Oatsby's neck forced the startled prisoner into a grotesque bow. With the little man in that position, Andy waved a hand toward him in the manner of a showman displaying an oddity.

"So, gentlemen," he concluded his speech, "I want you to meet Isaac Peabody, the slickest counterfeiter in seven states. Those bills were samples of his handiwork, made to order, I have no doubt, for this scheme!"

He handed Oatsby—or Peabody, as he now stood revealed—back to the custody of Tompkins, took a seat, and leaned back in comfort.

"And that," he said, "is the end of the *Eagle's* troubles for this voyage."

"But wait a minute!" exclaimed Harker. "How did you figure it all out? I can see now it was this counterfeit scheme you had in mind, but how did you guess it at the start?"

"It came easy—even if slow," Andy answered. "You see, I started thinking it wasn't natural that Blake'd rest with just hoping the Turnbulls would polish us off. That wasn't thorough enough for him, by half. And I couldn't see him arranging to let anyone else get away with half a million dollars, without trying to get a good-sized cut of it himself. So I figured he'd have a catch in it somewhere for his benefit.

"Another thing I noticed was Jake helping this man's wife aboard. By the way, Harker, scout up one of the women passengers to see to her, will you? She must be wild by now, poor thing—married to a crook like this one, too! You can tell her maybe it will be all right; though I've just got an idea——"

Harker left, and Peabody, his composure suddenly collapsed, spoke up.

"What d'yuh mean, all right?" he demanded, hoarsely. "What are you——"

"Never mind," Captain Andy snapped. "I mean all right for you—a better break than you've got a right to expect. Keep still and I'll tell you in good time. But I'll say now I know about your youngster, and I'm willing not to make things worse for him."

Peabody, though haggard with anxiety, took the hint to be silent, and all waited until Harker returned.

"She's cared for," he announced. "Wild to know what's going to happen, but I told her we'd let her know. Now what about Jake helping these people?"

"WELL, it wasn't like Jake, nohow," Andy resumed. "I couldn't see why he did it, less'n they was in cahoots. That looked more'n likely when each one got busy stirring up a crowd to fightin' heat, soon's they got aboard.

"Then came the fake row at the bar, and this fellow tellin' me about the Turnbulls. Leastwise, I thought the row was a fake, put up to turn suspicion from this fellow. Likewise, it gave him a chance to work in good with me by telling me 'bout the raid. I was willing to believe that. He wouldn't tell me a story that would turn out to be a fake next day."

"Then, too," Smith broke in, "maybe they didn't care whether you knew or not. Figured with Jake on board, you couldn't stop the Turnbulls, no matter what you did."

"Quite likely," Andy said. "But there was more to it than that. "Blake may have figured we couldn't lick the Turnbulls; but the way he had things fixed, he didn't care whether we did or not. He had us caught fore and aft, no matter which way things went—as I saw when Jake's fool stunt of spending one of their counterfeits put me on the track."

He broke off, sobered momentarily by thought of the trap, then went on.

"Yes, sir, if the raid went over, we'd be done and Blake's man'd have the real money, with everyone thinking the Turnbulls had got it. If the raid fizzled and we got through all right, the bank's agent would find himself stung with counterfeit, everyone'd think we made the switch, and still Blake's man would have the money, without suspicion pointing at him. A clever scheme, I'm telling you!"

"And here's something else," Harker exclaimed. "Your helping this fellow against Jake would hurt when we got to Iowa with the money. Someone would get on to his being Peabody, and since you helped him, everyone would think you and he were acting together."

Captain Andy slapped his thigh and laughed.

"Never thought of that," he said, "but the point's a good one. Score another one for Blake!

"Well, when I got the idea, I figured someone would be in to switch the money as soon as the room was empty, and that's when I bet you the ten, Harker," the captain resumed. "But you know how he fooled us on that, by putting out the light. But the real fooler was having his box salted with real money on the top. That took us in, Harker, lock, stock and barrel.

"Still, I couldn't get over the idea, somehow. When I found this letter in Jake's room—" he produced the missive and passed it around, continuing after all had read it—" and later the surgeon told me Peabody was a counterfeiter, the notion came back strong as ever. I figured then the switch would come later, that was all. So I let everything go ahead, and the rest you know."

Silence fell for a moment while they stared at each other, digesting the story. Peabody was the first to speak.

"Captain," he croaked, hoarse with anxiety. "Captain—a word, please! There's the missus, and that boy of ours you know about that Blake's got——"

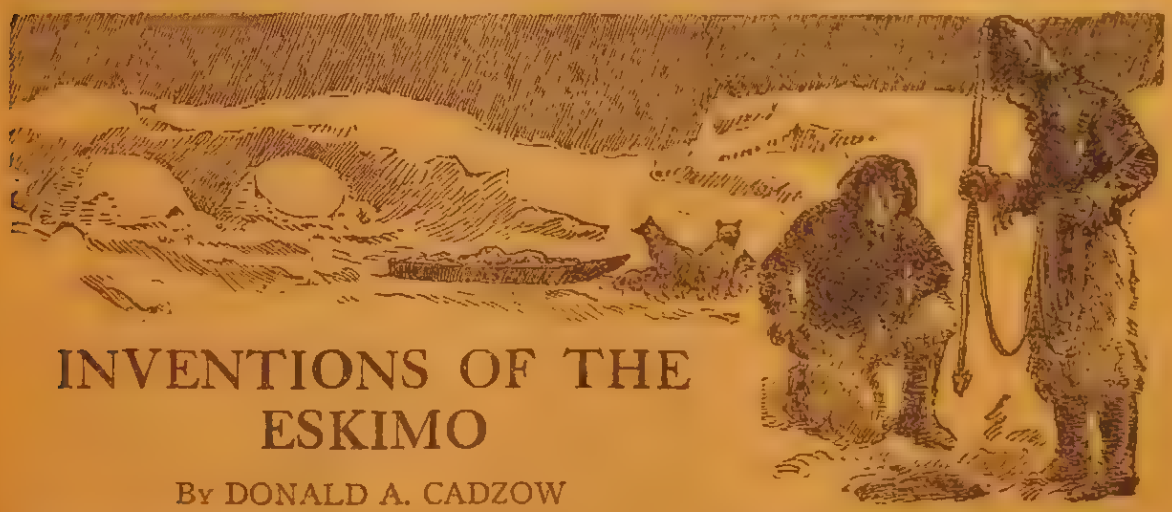
"Yes?" Captain Andy queried, as all eyes focused on the prisoner. "Want to know what's going to happen with you?"

Peabody nodded, and all waited to hear Andy's pronouncement.

"Well, here's how it is, gentlemen," he said. "We could send Blake over the road for his share in this job. But Blake has a crowd with him, and sending him over wouldn't keep them quiet. So I think we'd do better to keep this as a sort of club—sort of a peace bond, if you like.

"As long as Blake behaves, we'll keep still about this. The minute he or any of his crowd turns a hand, we'll let loose our story, produce a confession I'm sure Peabody'll sign, and that's the finish of Mr. Blake. So he'll keep quiet, and keep his crowd off us, too. But to do it that way, we'll have to let Peabody go. If we turned him in, it would show our hand.

"You might say it's a case of their tryin' to cross us and we double-crossing them. Cross and double-cross—fair enough. And it means an end to worry about Blake and all his crowd, long as we're on the river."



INVENTIONS OF THE ESKIMO

By DONALD A. CADZOW

WHEN the average person thinks of an Eskimo, he pictures in his mind a short, squat, lazy individual sitting on a cake of ice chewing a piece of raw blubber. But to the Arctic traveler, who has lived in the snow houses of these people and has trusted his life to them time and time again, they present a very different picture. He knows them as a clever, human and interesting people. Their snow houses are feats of engineering, and the principle of the arch used in building these has rarely been developed independently by mankind in the history of the world. The only other primitive people to devise it were the Mediterranean Sea Etruscans.

The snow-goggle made of wood, with a narrow slit to look through, and used to prevent snowblindness, is an Eskimo invention now being used to prevent Kleig eyes by motion picture directors.

The stone lamp burning seal oil and moss, invented by these people centuries ago, has made possible their occupancy of an otherwise uninhabitable region. It is interesting to note that the only other place that the wick lamp was used by primitive people was also in the neighborhood of the Mediterranean.

NEWSOM COMES BACK

TO MANY of our readers it is sufficient announcement of the next issue to say that J. D. Newsom will be on hand again with another Foreign Legion novelette. "The Foreign Legion Way" will take its place among the best stories he has given us. A tale of North Africa, of the vainglorious Kaid of Djel-Hamadah, of a clever and unscrupulous woman who bends him easily to play her game—and of the Foreign Legion that pays in blood to settle the score. Yes, it's a Barbour and Dagliev story.

Opening the next issue will be another of J. E. Grinstead's Western classics, "The Great Red Border," a complete novel of trail-herd days in frontier Texas, and one of the shootin'est Grinsteads yet. A turbulent section indeed was the Great Red Border, the banks of the Red River that separated the law-abiding country of Texas from the hazardous domain of rustlers and outlaws on the north. It is a typical Grinstead yarn—which means that you can taste the dust of the trail in your throat, and feel the breeze of the bullets as they speed on their destructive way.

L. Patrick Greene will be on hand with another Dynamite Drury novelette, entitled "Whitewash." Among the other regulars will be Eugene Cunningham, with another story about young Ware the Texas Ranger; Warren Hastings Miller, with another adventure of Bruce Romney in the Burma Secret Service; Charles Gilson, with a story about the virile Cinderface and the proposition he faces in distant China; James K. Waterman, with another of his stirring whaling stories; and Anthony M. Rud, with a gun-shooting Western tale. Besides these there will be several newcomers who stack right up with the old-timers and whom we feel you will be glad to meet. All that next time!

ADVICE TO CLAIM-JUMPERS

JAKE ENDER, in Robert V. Carr's "King of the Thundering Bar," in this issue, seems to locate half the creek on which he made his strike; while, to our notion, one is limited in the number of claims he may stake. So we asked Mr. Carr about it—and drew a mighty interesting reply.

"How many placer claims may a man locate?" he answers. "I have not had time to question a Government official and am not posted on recent rulings. But recent rulings do not apply to my story, 'King of the Thundering Bar.' During the period of which I have written we located as many placer claims as we pleased, and held them as long as we performed the proper amount of assessment work.

"In some cases miners made their own laws and limited the size and number of claims one man might hold. But ordinarily, in the old days, a man located any number he desired. I located and held placer claims when I was a miner. As long as I performed the assessment work, my rights were respected.

"Forest reserves and the increasing paternalism of the Government have thrown the old free customs aside. In the old days a prospector simply put up a discovery notice and recorded his claim with the register of deeds. Today, if the ground is in a forest reserve, he is subject to the ap-

proval or disapproval of the forest officer. In the old days he was subject only to his own wishes.

"In the days of 'King of the Thundering Bar' prospectors were an independent set and extremely jealous of their rights and liberties. If one found a creek that suited him, he might locate a string of twenty placer claims. That was his creek, and other prospectors so regarded it. He was not crowded with legal exactions. If he failed to do the assessment work, no old-timer would think of jumping his claims any more than an old-time cowman would think of intruding on another cowman's range. Law or no law, that sort of thing wasn't done by the old-timers. Custom was stronger than any law or red tape. The man who thought he could invade some old-timer's domain with a set of law books might find himself dodging lead. If he stopped a bullet, there were no mourners.

"I knew of rich placer ground held year after year by old-timers without doing the proper amount of assessment work. But they were in possession, they had been there for years, it was their ground, and only a fool would think of jumping it. If some featherhead, obsessed with the idea of the power of the law, tried to jump the claims, he could expect to do some personal jumping unless he desired to curl up around a hunk of lead.

"Even now there are places in the West where a claim-jumper, though loaded down with law, would be riddled with lead before he got started. I know of one old boy on the desert who has about two hundred acres of dry placer. He hasn't performed enough assessment work on the claims to hold one legally, but I am not going to jump his claims. If I had the claim-jumper's itch, I would not jump them. If I had three or four sheriffs with me, I would not jump them. Why? Well, as long as he lived the old boy would hunt me. Sooner or later he would get me. He would not care where he got me either, on Broadway, the highway, the desert, or down on my knees in church. Sooner or later he would plug me.

"When questioning a man's rights as to number of claims and the proper amount of assessment work, it is best, if there is any 'jumping' idea in the head, to ascertain if the prospector is an old-timer or not. If he is an old-timer, lay all questions of law aside and refrain from jumping his ground. This is 1927, but lead travels just as fast as it did in 1887. I had men in my camp on the Mojave who reminded me of the old-timers I knew when I was a ten-year-old. Hard men, not afraid to die any moment for what they consider their rights. They hold groups of placer and quartz claims. I have never felt the slightest desire to question their claims. I do not think enough of any kind of a claim to stop a hunk of lead for it. Those desert rats would shoot. I don't know but what I would shoot, too, if some law-sharp thought to take advantage of the fact that I had failed to do my assessment work. At least I hope I would not lie down and say, 'Please take my ground, mister.'"

DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS

QUITE a different crowd from Carr's old-timers are the hardy fellows who "go down to the sea in ships." Yet who can say which type is the more interesting—especially when the sailor crowd are introduced and interpreted by one who knows them so well as S. B. H. Hurst, author of "The Son of a Sea Cook," in this issue

"'The Son of a Sea Cook' is a tale of the frontier I know best—the sea—and of the last of the pioneers, the sailors of the sailing ships," Mr. Hurst writes. "It is a true picture of those iron men with the souls of big children. Their ways were not the ways of the sea of today. They lacked education, and, like Tuttle's famous cowmen, they also lacked decorum. But they were men, and many Pharisees who would feel contaminated by associating with them would cling to them, crying, when in need. I may say that it would be as impossible to write of the old sailors without bringing in what most of them lived and worked for—whisky—as it would be impossible to give a picture of the old West without doing the same.

"Yet, again, I sometimes doubt if sailors have changed. Living here, near Bremerton, a naval station, I see many men of the Navy. They are different in this—they have excellent educations. But the other day I saw one bidding a tearful farewell to a crack in the sidewalk, because, for some strange reason, the crack had interested him. He was telling the crack that he had to go back to his ship. This is a fact—not fiction. And I am certain that that sailor was a first class man—like Epictetus in my story. No constitutional amendment can alter the result of thousands of years of evolution—can

READERS' FAVORITE COUPON

"Readers' Favorite" Editor, FRONTIER STORIES,
Garden City, N. Y.

The stories in this number I like best are those marked below (indicate your favorites by numerals 1 to 5—1 for your first choice, 2 for the second, etc.)

—Barbary Blood	—Dayong Gets Mislaid
—Wanted——?	—Long-Leaf Lands
—The Son of a Sea Cook	—A Cupid In Sea Boots
—No Quarter	—Random Shadows of the Old Frontier
—Three Wise Men of the North	—Cross and Double Cross
—King of the Thundering Bar	

I did not like_____

Name_____ Address_____

change the inner souls of adventurers, of rovers, of men who go down to the sea in ships."

FROM FAR-OFF BURMA

AFTER reading two or three of Warren Hastings Miller's stories it is unnecessary to tell you that Mr. Miller has been there and knows. Very much of a globe-trotter is Miller, with a penchant for little known places and a delight for squatting down and living with strange peoples. Which, of course, is why the "feel" of the country impregnates all his work, as it does "Dayong Gets Mislaid," his story in this issue.

"I have long wanted to stage a story on Shwe Dagon, the Great Golden Pagoda of Rangoon," Mr. Miller says of the setting of this tale. "I was fortunate in being one of the last white men to see it before the edict forbidding it to whites went forth. Montagu, the British Secretary for the Colonies, granted it to the *pongyis*, and it caused a lot of growling in Burma as giving the natives one more inch, whereat they would promptly take an ell. The thing was qualified by permitting a white man to go up 'native'—that is, barefoot—but no *sahib* could do that with dignity. I don't think it has been changed since my time. Tourists and steamship companies probably growl a lot, but the *pongyis* don't want them rubbering around the temples, and that's the gist of it."

THE MAIL POUCH

THAT readers keep a keen eye on the physical makeup of the magazine, as well as its reading content, is evidenced by the following letter:

Editor, FRONTIER STORIES,
Dear Sir:—

I have just finished reading the March issue of FRONTIER STORIES and am eagerly waiting for the next copy. It seems to me that I am always waiting for the next month's issue; in fact, I wish it were a semi-monthly so that it would not be so long to wait in between times.

There are several things that endear me to FRONTIER STORIES. To begin with, it has every story complete—no serials to break off in the middle of the climax to leave one biting fingernails and worrying or cussing the author until the next issue; darn all serials anyway. Next, the Contents page is one to be proud of. It tells in a clear, concise way what to expect, and makes you feel as if you can hardly wait to start the reading itself. Then the paper and printing itself, both of which are the life of any magazine. The type and reading in FRONTIER STORIES is not equaled in any other magazine printed. Finally, we come right down to the heart of the magazine itself, the stories and the authors. The stories cannot be improved upon.

My favorite author I have never had the pleasure of reading in FRONTIER STORIES, but I hope to some day, and when I do, I know I will feel as if it is too good to be true. The man I would like to meet in FRONTIER STORIES is W. C. Tuttle, and I hope you get him on your payroll or writers' role or whatever it is that you get authors to do. Of the FRONTIER STORIES' authors, honest I have never been able to make a choice. First, it's Newsom, then along comes Grinstead and I change my mind. Along comes Ware. I get settled or think I am and you have to go and give us Cunningham, and I start all over again. If you ever have a popularity contest for authors I hope you blow up because I am sure I am not the only one who would not know which way to vote.

Hope I have not bored you with my summing up of FRONTIER STORIES, the best magazine printed. Success and everything, I remain,

Sincerely,
George R. Latham,
450 Brunswick Ave.,
Trenton, New Jersey.

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